

Matthew 2:1-6

After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, "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."

When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.

When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born.

"In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:

"`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 be the shepherd of my people Israel.' "

I have known the stories around the birth of Jesus for such a long time, Christmas has always been special for me, but one thing that has always annoyed me about it is the fact that the Magi, the three kings, or the three wise men; or maybe one or two or an even larger number, because we don't really know how many of them there were, marched straight in there and got Jesus into trouble before he had even grown up! How could they have been so daft! Didn't they know that Herod was a dangerous usurping despot who didn't draw the line at killing

his own wife and child because they were more popular than him!

“Where is he that has been born King of the Jews?” they asked, rather pompously and they walked straight into a political trap. Didn’t they realize that they were putting Jesus in danger, what were they thinking!

But of course, my annoyance with them is totally misplaced, of course they didn’t realize, they went to the obvious place, the capital city, the royal palace, where else would they go?

A king had to be there, didn’t he, where else would a king be? Kings and palaces go together, it probably never occurred to them that he wouldn’t be there. But we are not talking of an earthly king, we are talking of the son of God himself, come down to earth from heaven, a place so amazing that it is beyond our wildest imagination.

We know the story of the incarnation so well, don’t we? and I think we take it for granted. The baby, in the manger in a stable in Bethlehem is so familiar to us that we think nothing of it, but actually if we reflect for a moment the story is truly shocking. He really should not have been there at all should he?

The reality of God himself being born as a human being is enough to get the mind round without the totally unexpected and unheard of truth that he was born into abject poverty, in an occupied country with

a despotic king, was laid in an animals feeding trough, the son of an unmarried mother and spent his early life as a political refugee., thanks to these three loud mouthed strangers.

I wonder where you would have put him, perhaps you can come up with a better scenario for the birth of the son of God.

So why did God, who could have chosen anywhere in the whole world for his son to be born in, do it this way. Why put his son in danger, why put his son into political turmoil, why put his son into poverty, why put his son on the outside of the social norms of the time, and why oh why was he put at the mercy of injustice and bigotry?

Christians believe that God chose this way so that Jesus could identify with the very poorest and unloved of this world. So that we, you and me and people throughout the world would know, without a shadow of a doubt that God knows exactly what it is to be a human being just like us. He has experienced our joys and times of celebration, but also our sorrows and our pains, he has confronted illness, he knows what it is like to be lonely, he has felt the pain of bereavement, and he has faced violent death and acute injustice. He identified totally with us then and still does now.

But the wonder is that because he chose this way, his victory over life and death is much more

profound. He lived our life and died our death without putting a foot wrong, he lived and died demonstrating once and for all the love of God for his world. He was cut down in the prime of his life, only to demonstrate that real life is so much more than we can ever experience without him. Real life is in his hands and as we come to him we receive life in a new way. Eternal life.

If Jesus had been born in a palace he could never have achieved what he set out to achieve. He would have been just another rich man and his message would have been lost in the glamour of celebrity, something up there and out of reach of the majority of humanity.

I was so glad that this service was to be in the Minster, because this glorious building that we treasure so much is a great visual aid to what I want to say this evening.

The question I want to put to us all is this “where do we find God in our day and age?”, and indeed this is a question that has been asked consistently throughout the ages. This is exactly the question that the Magi asked so long ago, after following the star to Jerusalem. They went to the big important buildings of their age, they went to the palaces and the royalty, they went to the riches and the celebrity, but they found that God was not there.

Today we are not so different, people come here to Beverley Monster all the time, most of them, I suspect, searching for a glimpse of transcendence. They look at this pile of ancient stone, they listen to it's history and hope that they can find something here that speaks to them of God. They might not admit it, even to themselves.

But where is God? I suspect that a lot leave disappointed, somehow they have missed him along the way.

I want to suggest tonight that God is indeed here, but he isn't hiding in the chancel, he isn't to be found in the roof, he isn't embodied in the statues and he isn't to be found in the tomb of St John and he is not hiding in the shadows above us just out of sight or even in the organ pipes..

He is here, really here, in you and me, with you and me, living his life within our lives, reaching out to others in the love that we show to other people. He is in the welcome we give to the tourist as they come to our door, he is in the words of comfort that we use as we seek to ease the pain of those in need, he is in the generosity that we extend to the stranger, he is in the prayers that we pray for those in distress. He is in the choir room as the voices of the boys and girls are nurtured with love and care. He is in the kind hearts of all those who volunteer to help, he is received with the soup and sandwiches, main courses and puddings at the shoppers lunch

and in the cup of coffee poured from the flasks. He is in the garden in the hearts of those who tend it with love. And he is in the bread and wine of our life together as a Christian community, sharing our joys and our sorrows with one another and with our God.

And he is in our worship too, but I do believe that he inhabits our worship only as our hearts are open to his Holy Spirit and to our fellow worshippers. If we are annoyed at the choice of music, if we are upset about the words used, or if our hearts are hard towards one another then God cannot use our worship to build us into his kingdom here on earth as he seeks to do. He longs that people open the door of this Minster and are overwhelmed by a sense of the presence of his Holy Spirit in the holy people who are part of the life of this historic place.

Our God is an everyday God, who by his Spirit lived right here with and in you and me, he is a God who longs for us to involve him in everything we do and he lives in our churches and in our ceremonies and in our worship only as much as we as individuals and as a people are open to his love.

And it follows then that he is also evident in our everyday lives too. As Christians we are called to be his witnesses, and we are that, everyday of our lives. No matter what we do, as we interact with others, as we do our jobs, in our choice of entertainment, as we shop and live with our families,

we are his witnesses and as people see us and meet with us then they have the opportunity to meet with our God too. Let's not waste those opportunities with a witness that is less than the best we can offer.

Let us pray for a love that is evident to all and in everything we do.

We sometimes forget just how extraordinary is our faith. That God left the most special, spectacular, amazing, wonderful - there really are no words fit to describe what he left, and was born in a stable in Palestine, is the most special, spectacular, amazing, wonderful fact of history that there is. Let us live the truth of it, everyday of our lives.

JESUS: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

