

DARLING DOWNS PARISH OF THE AELC
TRINITY OAKLEY, ST PAUL'S GREENWOOD, ST JOHN'S AUBIGNY,
BETHLEHEM TOOWOOMBA

6 January 2019

Bulletin for the Epiphany of our Lord

HYMNS: 45 147 40 47 163 746

INTROIT: O God, give Your judgments to the king, and Your righteousness to the King's Son!
Let Him judge Your people with righteousness and Your poor people with justice!
May the mountains bring peace to the people and may the hills bring righteousness!
May He award justice to those who are poor among the people! May He save the children of needy people and crush the oppressor!
May they fear You as long as the sun endures and as long as the moon, throughout all generations!
May He come down like rain on mown grass, like showers that sprinkle the earth!
May the righteous person flourish in His days, and may there be widespread peace until the moon is no more!
May He rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth!
May people in the dry land **bend their knees before Him!** May His enemies lick the dust!
May the kings of Tarshish and the coastlands bring a gift! May the kings from Sheba and Seba **bring tribute!**
May all kings **bow down to Him!** May all nations serve Him!

Psalm 72:1-11

COLLECT: O God, by the leading of a star You made known Your only Son to the Gentiles. Lead us, who know You by faith, to enjoy in heaven the fullness of Your divine presence; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

READINGS: Isaiah 60:1-6 Gentiles will come to Your light.

Ephesians 3:1-12 In Christ Jesus the Gentiles have the same inheritance.

Matthew 2:1-12 Wise men from the East came to worship Him.

SERMON: Ephesians 2:1-12 Rejoice in the mystery – God's plan for our salvation

The Lord's Supper has always been seen as a sign of unity between those who commune together at the Lord's table (1 Cor. 10:17). When Christians partake of the Lord's Supper in a church body that has a confession of faith, they thereby declare that they believe that they are one in faith with those who commune with them. Since people cannot honestly hold two differing confessions at the same time, they cannot honestly commune with those whose confession is in conflict with their own. If any do this nevertheless, they deny their own confession, and so deny Christ Himself (2 Cor. 6:14-18). **We ask visitors who are communicant members in a church not in fellowship with the AELC, or are not familiar with the AELC Statement of Faith, to refrain from communing today. If you have questions, please speak with the pastor after service.**

The Visit of the Wise Men

Artists often picture the Wise Men as worshipping the infant Jesus alongside the shepherds in the stable at Bethlehem. This makes a lovely picture, but it contradicts the facts Matthew has recorded for us. We don't know the names of these men (tradition calls them Casper, Balthazar, and Melchior), how many there were, exactly where they came from, or precisely when they came.

We do know that they arrived a number of months after Jesus' birth, for Jesus had already been circumcised and presented in the temple, and Mary and Joseph were now in a house in Bethlehem, not in the stable. Secular records tell us that Herod the king died in 4 B.C. This would indicate that Jesus may have been born in 5 or 6 B.C. according to our calendar.

The Wise Men were a class of priests, astronomers, and astrologers. They were influential advisors of the king, very likely in Babylon. Some of them were involved in various occult practices. During the 70 years of the Jews' captivity in Babylon (586-516 B.C.), Daniel was made the presiding officer over the caste of Wise Men. From him they surely learned about the Messiah for whom the Jews were waiting. They also had opportunities to learn what Israel's prophets had foretold about the Messiah. They took these promises very seriously and believed in Israel's God; otherwise they would hardly have undertaken the long and dangerous journey to find and worship Jesus.

The star that guided them was a special creation of God. It did not look like other stars, and it did not act like other stars. Efforts to explain it as a conjunction of the planets Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars or as a meteor or a comet are not satisfactory.

The Wise Men saw this special star in the east. They saw it again when they travelled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and it guided them to the very house where Mary and Joseph were staying with the Christ Child.

How did they know that this special star signified that the Messiah had been born? All we can say is that God revealed this to them. In Balaam’s prophecy that “a star will come out of Jacob” (Numbers 24:17), the star is the Messiah Himself, not a heavenly body announcing His birth.

It was natural for the Wise Men to come to the capital city of Jerusalem. They expected everyone there to know about the Messiah’s birth, and they were surprised when they asked around and received no information. After a while King Herod heard about the Wise Men and their search.

Herod was upset upon hearing the news of the birth of Jesus, who was called King of the Jews. Even though he was obviously near the end of his life (he died in 4 B.C.), he felt threatened by the report of a newborn King. Since all of Jerusalem knew how violent Herod could be, the people were disturbed when he was upset.

When Herod summoned the men who were authorities on the Old Testament Scriptures, they immediately told him that Bethlehem in Judah was the place where the Messiah was to be born. The prophet Micah had clearly foretold this (Micah 5:2). Although Bethlehem was a small, undistinguished village, God had chosen it as the place where His Son, the Messiah, would be born. The “little town of Bethlehem” would gain a distinction that the grandest city on earth could never match.

Herod’s hypocrisy deceived the Wise Men. They took him at his word when he asked them to report back to him after finding the special Child in Bethlehem. He pretended that he wanted to worship the newborn King too. Actually, he wanted to use the Wise Men to help him locate and identify the Christ Child so that he could easily destroy this threat to his personal authority.

Guided by the special star, the Wise Men located the Christ Child, together with Mary and Joseph, in a house in Bethlehem. They worshipped Him and presented Him with costly gifts. We can see rich symbolism in all three gifts. Precious gold suggests royalty, for Jesus was the King of the Jews. The incense reminds us of Christ’s deity. Incense was regularly used in connection with worship at the temple. Its aromatic smoke rising to the heavens symbolised the God-pleasing prayers of the people ascending to the throne of God. Myrrh symbolises Jesus’ humanity and pointed to His suffering and death. It was an aromatic resin used in perfume and in the embalming process. It also served as a kind of anaesthetic when mixed with wine. That was why the Roman soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with myrrh as He hung on the cross (Mark 15:23), but He refused to drink it.

That is the symbolism we see in the gifts of the Wise Men. We cannot say to what extent they, at that time, understood the symbolism that is so clear to us now, as we look back at their gifts to the Christ Child. Perhaps they just wanted to give the infant Jesus the most special gifts they could bring from their homeland.

Having been warned by God in a dream, the Wise Men did not return to Herod in Jerusalem. They took a different route home, and the Christ Child was protected from the murderous wrath of Herod.

Welcome to all worshipping with us today! May God bless our worship of Him by His serving of us!
 Pastor Peter Ziebell, Phone 0407583922.
 Email him at pziebell@gmail.com
 Weekly sermons and bulletins are available at www.aelc.org.au.
Please notify pastor of anyone who is unwell or in need of a visit.

COMING SERVICES

13 January The Baptism of Jesus	20 January 2 Epiphany	27 January 3 Epiphany
8.30am TMBA HC 8.30am OAK LR 9.00am GRN LR 10.30am AUB HC	8.30am TMBA LR 9.30am OAK HC Confirmation 9.00am GRN LR 9.30am AUB LR	8.30am TMBA HC 8.30am OAK LR 10.00am GRN HC** 10.30am AUB HC
Sunday, 13 January		
READINGS: Isaiah 43:1-7; Romans 6:1-11; Luke 3:15-22		
HYMNS: 39 748 (tune 216) 392 (325 80 (tune 159)) 279		
Sunday, 20 January		
READINGS: Isaiah 62:1-5; 1 Corinthians 12:1-11; John 2:1-11		
HYMNS: 16 749 149 796 OAK: 301 16 296 294 291 300		

ANNOUNCEMENTS

The next AELC youth group meeting will be on the 12th of January at the Sippel’s home for swimming at 1pm.