

## **Sermons at All Saints Anglican Church of Luxembourg**

**Preached by Rev Geoff Read on Epiphany Sunday 2024**

**Passages: Isaiah 60:1-6, Matthew 2:1-12**

### **Introduce Word section**

Q: If you are presented with a question, something you need to make sense of: What is your main source of information?

As we listen now to our Bible readings ask yourself: (1) who are the people the passage is for or about and (2) try to identify the way these people get information or make sense of new things

### **Introduce Isaiah**

Prophecy, prophet, C6 BC, people in Exile in Babylon, hint of return to a home that generation have heard of but never lived in -

### **Introduce Matthew**

Matthew, C1, a mainly Jews who believe Jesus is their promised Messiah but who find themselves pushed out of the Jewish community by other Jews who disagree and who now see non-Jews coming to believe the same things they do about Jesus

### **Sermon**

If you walk along this road and stop outside the Cathedral you will see a tree – its full of stars. And each time I have walked past recently there have always been people standing, looking up, drawn to the tree and the stars

Both passages are about people being drawn towards somewhere or someone – In Isaiah ancient Jews being drawn home to Jerusalem from all the places they have been scattered, In Matthew Jews and now especially Gentiles, the magi, being drawn to Jesus

Both passages speak of confusion about what is happening – Isaiah says its like darkness covering the earth and the peoples,

In Matthew the magi are confused: their study of astrology has foretold a new king, but when they turn up at the royal palace in Jerusalem, they only find a confused and fearful old king called Herod. And even when they do follow the star it's to an ordinary house, and a baby, possibly in poverty and certainly instability

Back in Jerusalem Herod, confused by the visit of the magi, is wanting information about what might be happening. The religious leaders know the old Jewish prophecies but have no expectation that it is anything but an old and now out of date story

And what of Mary as into her house comes not another angel but now weary gentile travellers who kneel before her baby son and produce strange gifts full of wonderful but also frightening meaning: gold symbolic of kingship, frankincense used by priests but also chillingly myrrh, usually only produced to treat dead bodies

How could they make sense then of their confusion?

And we today, as we begin a new year which those words of Isaiah still describe pretty well: For darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples ...”

As we see increasing political instability, ongoing wars, the climate crisis

The things going on in our lives and those of ones we love

How do we make sense, find hope?

Well, read on to the next line ...

“... but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you...” (Isaiah 60:2b)

What does that phrase mean, I wonder? How do you hear it – reassuring, encouraging?

This arising and appearing of God over the people of Isaiah’s day, over those at time of Jesus’s birth was about how God enabled them to make sense of what was happening and how even those confusing things could be woven into His good purposes of love if they allowed Him to

Not to wave a magic wand and make the bad disappear

- The Exiles will face the hard work of packing up and walking home, rebuilding cities and livelihoods
- The magi are warned of Herod’s violent intentions and so return home another way
- And for the Holy family escape comes by becoming refugees in Egypt until the death of Herod

“... but the Lord will arise upon you, and his glory will appear over you...”

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And that is the crucial thing – if they will allow Him to

Note how the gentile magi went on to find Jesus but the religious leaders stayed – same prophecy but very different responses

And, of course, this arising and appearing is for us today too

Inviting us to decide how we will make sense of all that is happening today, whether we will seek God’s perspective, His way, and whether we will allow them to be woven into God’s purpose of love for us and our world

“... but the Lord will arise ...”

I love that phrase in the face of what seems like the thick darkness of uncertainty, fear, instability

As we pray now: where do you long for God’s help you make sense, weave even that confusing thing into His purposes of love?