



## Christmas Steps: WORSHIP

Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> December 2024

Matthew 2:1-3

Christmas always seems to be full of plans and extra visits, catch ups with people you haven't seen for a while, foods you haven't eaten for the last 12 months and rush to get everything ready in time. A thousand and one things in a thousand different directions. And if you've spent the last 11 months saying yes to too many things it may just be about to get a whole lot worse.

1 But...**God is inviting you to step away from the busy and the mundane**, to step into His presence; to step away from the passing pleasures of this world, **to step into His eternal glory**. And this I believe is why the wise men became part of the world's second most amazing story.

2 As they were drawn, step by step, away from the glory of God's creation (which they had studied meticulously for years by way of the stars) into the glory of the Creator. We find them in Matthew's gospel 2:1-2,

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, <sup>2</sup>saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

This message brings you five things about true worship of the King of kings so you too can step into His glory.

3 Firstly, worship is a collective act – it is done together in community. Matthew mentions 'wise men' in the plural, **THEY** came **TOGETHER** to worship. When

4 God sent Moses before Pharaoh in Exodus 7:13 we read,

And you shall say to him, 'The Lord God of the Hebrews has sent me to you, saying, "Let My people go, that they may serve [worship] Me in the wilderness";

5 The Hebrew word *abad* is translated more commonly as 'serve' but carries the meaning the working, serving and worshiping. It points us to the lifestyle (everything about our lives) being centred around and directed towards God. But God's intention even from day six of creation when He made Eve also, was that Adam (and all those born of Him) would never worship alone.

6 And this is heaven, in Revelation 7:9-10,

After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,<sup>10</sup> and crying out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

Worship is an act of togetherness, which is why one of Paul's chief concerns throughout his New Testament letters is unity.

7 Secondly, True worship demands we step away from where we are to where He is. As Matthew tells us,

8 from the East came to Jerusalem

They stepped away from all the comforts of the East into unfamiliar territory. True worship of Jesus the King demands we step away from the comforts of what we know, away from all that is familiar into His throne room.

However, our instinctive reaction is to stay in the familiar and pull away from the sights and sounds of worship together at His throne. Sometimes that even happens in this space. We want the familiar sounds of worship whilst our hearts have stayed away, cooled by the attraction of performance, content with the appearance of doing the right things whilst ignoring all God has revealed Himself to be.

One of the reasons worship is so transforming is because it demands we move away from the mundane to something extraordinary. Worship is expressing your joy and amazement of Jesus, as experienced by the woman at the well in John 4:29,

9 "Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?"

10 True worship is moving from believing everything we think we are to seeing everything He says He is.

11 And thirdly, True worship demands we seek the true King. It demands effort. The wise men said,

Where is He who has been born King of the Jews?

It involves asking for directions. Surely getting to Jerusalem was near enough? Haven't we moved far enough? Won't this do?

12 Jesus didn't nearly die, near enough to Jerusalem, for nearly all your sins, on something that vaguely resembled a cross. Jesus, fully God, fully man, fully died on a full cross, outside the walls of Jerusalem fully for all your sins once for all! No one needs a near enough gospel because it will do us no good to get somewhere near to God. As John 10:10 tells us,

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

That full life Jesus came to give you is being stolen by a thief. Who, you say, is the thief? Often times, you and I are that thief. Every choice to bring less than His life and death demands is glory stolen from its rightful owner.

Would you take a gift from under the tree that did not have your name on it? No! And yet you would take His glory, and adoration and worship, by giving Him less.

14 Fourthly, worship demands we move on from the experience of revelation to the experience of the King Himself.

The wise men saw His star in the East. But if they had stopped and focused on the signpost, the evidence, they would have failed to bring any worship to Him.

15 Romans 1:25 describes this killer condition we know as sin and says this,

who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.

The price of believing this lie could not be bigger either. Imagine seeing the stars every night and wondering who their Maker is, never to see the baby in the manger?

Imagine bringing a child into this world never to know the one put breath in its very lungs.

Imagine studying and playing exquisite music and never knowing who brought you that gift, and never hearing the music of heaven itself.

16 Imagine seeing miracles around you, even in your own body, and yet never seeing the Miracle-Maker.

17 Fifthly and finally, true worship demands all distractions are gone. They said,

[we] have come to worship Him

Their statement was as clear as their intent. Do you intend to come a feel good, or catch up, or tell them what you've been up to or do you come to worship.

Do you prepare yourself to give everything to Him in worship or are you so wrapped up in getting everything else wrapped up that your worship is like the crumbs on the table left behind after a meal.

18

Many years ago Imogen and I hosted an event at our home and someone gave us a present to say thank you. It was one of those multi-boxes of miniature Green & Blacks chocolates. A really lovely and generous gift we thought, especially as we had never met them before. We looked forward to sitting down with a quiet cup of tea and enjoying this gift once the event was over.

Stunned by the generosity of someone we had never met my eyes when to look at the best before date...it was last year! And what appeared to be a very generous gift; what looked like the real deal, was actually an out of date cheap alternative – probably a leftover gift they never wanted.

And that is what a life full of distractions will bring in terms of worship, an out of date, tired, effort that looks like the real thing, but fails to deliver.

19

**Will you, this Christmas season, step aside from the mundane and ordinary into His glory and come together bringing our best, whatever the cost, without distraction?**