**Matthew 2:1-12**

**Jesus Christ – a God to be worshipped**

In John 4:23, we read these words of Christ: “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him”.

Christmas is a fantastic opportunity for us as a church to tell others about the Christian faith. So many hundreds of people come through the church through December and January. We have opportunities to sing carols in the Market Place. We have Nativity Services aplenty; school children and parents flocking in through the doors.

And here we are today, celebrating Epiphany, with another well known Biblical narrative: the arrival of the Wise Men to worship Jesus.

At this season, perhaps more than any other except Easter, the church has a wonderful opportunity, an open invitation even, to share the Christian faith and, importantly too, to remind others why the church is actually here at all.

As you probably know, we have had a Mission Action Plan at St. Andrew’s since March 2015, which has underpinned all that we have done in that time and has provided a structure for our strategic decision-making. The time has come for us to renew that Mission Action Plan as we look forward to where God wants to take us in 2018 and beyond, and there will be much more to be said about this over the coming weeks.

But underpinning the new Mission Action Plan, I am sure, will be a renewed sense of who we actually are as a church and what we are here to do/

What on earth is the church for anyway? It’s a good question to ask…

Is the church here to provide the moral compass for the nation? No, that’s not our primary purpose.

Is the church here to undertake works of charity and social justice? No, that’s not our primary purpose.

Is the church here to preaching the Gospel and lead people to salvation? No, that’s not our primary purpose.

Yes, the church seeks to promote morality. Yes, the church seeks to engage with social justice issues. Yes, the church engages in mission. But none of these are our primary purpose.

The primary purpose of the church is revealed clearly in John 4:23, where Jesus says this: “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him”.

Worship.

That is what the church is all about.

Worship.

We are here on this earth, primarily, to worship God our Creator. We thought about that in the autumn when we did our sermon series on ‘What Christians Believe’. Our primary purpose here on earth as human beings, and our primary purpose as a church here in Enfield, is to worship God. That is what life is all about. That is what the St Andrew’s Church is all about. And that verse from John reminds us that the Father seeks those who worship him.

So what is worship? How do we define it?

We can talk about singing hymns, we can talk about praying, we can talk about receiving the bread and wine at the Eucharist, we can talk about reading the Bible. But none of these things, in and of themselves, are worship. These are things that we may do *when* we worship…

Certainly, the rituals we use in church can be done worshipfully, but we must never define our worship by the rituals because then we lose the heart of what worship is about and become more attached to the rituals than we do to the act of worship itself. There is a crucial difference that we must never lose sight of between expressions of worship: which are the rituals and the attitude of worship: which is worship itself. We must be careful never to confuse the expression of worship with the attitude of worship.

And it’s the attitude of worship I want to think about this morning through our story in Matthew 2:1-12; the story of the wise men coming to Jesus. Because this story comes close to defining worship for us.

In this story, we see worship being defined as adoration of God from our spirit. Our spirit, our soul is the seat of our personality: our mind, emotions and will. And worship is the bringing of our mind, emotions and will into the presence of God and using them to adore him and glorify him. And there’s three points I want to make about worship from this passage.

**1. Worship is a journey**

The wise men went on a journey. We don’t know how far that journey was but historically we believe that it was a considerable distance. We don’t know the details of the journey: from the East to Bethlehem is all we know.

But we can say that, in a metaphorical sense, they journeyed from knowledge to worship. These men studied the stars; they had a wealth of knowledge, enough even to convince them of the birth of the Messiah in a distant land. And so they journeyed, starting out with knowledge. But the journey ended with worship. In verse 11, we read: “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.”

These wise men journeyed from knowledge to worship.

We might think that the journey from the head to the heart is short indeed: eighteen inches or less. But actually, for many people, the journey from head to heart can take a lifetime.

Of course, when we worship God, we do not leave knowledge behind. Our knowledge, our rationality informs our worship. But worship, by definition, is more than knowledge. It is adoration of God, stemming from body, mind and will.

Firstly then, worship is a journey: from the head to the heart.

**2. Worship is a costly business**

The wise men had been on a long journey. We don’t know how long – but it was long…

Often, we think that the wise men visited Jesus in the stable where he was born. Our crib scenes portray that image. But that’s not the case. The shepherds saw Jesus in the manger - but in verse 11 of this passage, the wise men met with Jesus in what the Greek states as the ‘oikian’, which means ‘the house’. Jesus was at home, a toddler with his mother and father.

Perhaps the journey had taken many months, maybe even years. And so, for the wise men, worship was a costly business in terms of time, energy and self-sacrifice.

But, of course, it was costly because they brought gifts with them: gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Worship is a costly business. There is personal sacrifice involved if we are to worship in spirit and in truth. In the Old Testament, David said: “I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.”

And I think the cost of worship is that, like the wise men, we bring something with us to leave with Jesus. Perhaps we bring our love. Perhaps we bring our anxieties or fears for the future. Perhaps we bring with us our hurt and pain or our disappointments. But if we want to be real in worship, rather than just go through the motions we must be sure of what we bring to Jesus today and what we want to leave with him.

Because we are not doing God a favour when we worship him. Worship is more than that…

And it is not as if anything we do bring to worship is worthy of God: not even the gold, the frankincense and the myrrh came even close to being worthy gifts for the Lord Jesus.

Our worship doesn’t add anything to God. But through our worship we are transformed in the presence of God.

Worship is a journey – from the head to the heart.

Worship is costly – as we leave our gifts with God.

And thirdly, and finally, worship has a specific focus.

**3. The focus of worship**

Again, verse 11: “On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage.” They paid homage to Jesus Christ. That is the focus of worship: the only focus…

It is too easy to lose sight of this. We can too easily fall into making our theological doctrines the centre of our worship. We can too easily fall into making our rituals the centre of our worship. But, for the wise men, the worship of Jesus was more than doctrine, it was more than ritual. It was the adoration of the true and living God.

And so it must be for us, as we meet here today. Worship, for us, must be solely focussed on Jesus Christ. He is the God to be adored. And as we bring our gifts to him this morning, as we put our doctrines and rituals into proper perspective and bring our lives before him, so we will be transformed into his likeness and our lives will glorify God.

We are born to worship. It is where we find our true identity, our sense of purpose. And now, as we prepare to receive the bread and the wine, we commit ourselves to the worship of God in spirit and in truth.

As we move into 2018 as a church family, we want to put worship at the heart of our identity. The renewed Mission Action Plan will help us to do that as we strengthen forms of worship we already have and as we explore new ways of worshipping God, and think about how we can better engage the wider community with helpful opportunities to worship. All that is still to come in 2018 and beyond and it will be an exciting journey that we go on together. I am genuinely excited about where God is taking us as a church. I hope that you are excited too…

But for now, this morning, we recommit ourselves to God as a people of worship. We recognise God’s greatness and we recognise the fact that he is worthy of our praise. As we prepare today to move forward into God’s future for us in 2018, we start in the way we will carry on: in an attitude of worship and prayer and praise, receiving his grace through the bread and the wine, receiving his grace into our lives and offering ourselves back to him so that we can be the people and the church that he longs for us to be.

Jesus said, “The hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him”.

God is seeking us out. All we need to do is to be found by him.