

COR Newsletter – 02 January 2008

Dear all

HAPPY NEW YEAR to everybody associated with the Church of the Resurrection.

Christmas review.

Like all Churches we have had a very busy time. We have hosted two school carol concerts, a Swedish Lucia service, an English carol service, a Romanian carol service, held our Church Christmas party, a midnight mass and a Christmas day service on top of normal Sunday services. I hope everyone who visited our church over the Christmas season took something away from the experience (not literally of course!). And as with any service at our church I hope people deepened their experience of God or gave them space to think about things a little more deeply.

Next Sunday... Is Epiphany!

Epiphany is the season when we celebrate occasions where the true nature of Jesus was revealed. East and West have differed in their emphasis over the centuries. In the West Epiphany has become associated chiefly with the visit of the Magi. In the East the main event in Jesus' life they concentrate on is the 'Baptism of Christ' when the words from heaven "This is my son the Beloved. With Him I am well pleased" are attributed to the event. In church we shall burn a little incense (just to annoy you!). There will be a **Sunday school** as normal and our **Produce sale**. I know many people are still away - including Lillah who normally organises the Produce sale, but we are having it regardless! Try your hand at baking something to sell and bring it along.

Next Week...

I am travelling to the UK for a few days to see my parents. This is my first trip to the UK in 18 Months and has come about because my mother Audrey is going into hospital for a heart bypass operation. I will therefore not be contactable from Monday 7th January and for the following week.

Important upcoming event... The Britannia Ball.

This will take place on the 15th February at the Intercontinental hotel. As ever we will be relying on the efforts of the congregation to both advertise the event and sell the tickets (which will be produced shortly). Tickets will be sold at 95 euros

Thought for the day - heavily indebted to scholar and writer William Dalrymple from his book *In Xanadu*.

"Magi from the East came to Jerusalem"(Matthew 2: 1)

This verse in Matthew is the source of all the traditions concerning the "three wise men" or "three kings" from the East visiting Jesus in Bethlehem. The first thing to say is that both *wise men* and *kings* are both wrong interpretations of what Matthew actually wrote. Among all the Greek prose of Matthew this word "Magi" stands out as a solitary foreign word. Magi is a Persian word and has a very specific meaning - it is the name of the ancient priestly caste of the religion of Zoroastrianism.

Dalrymple goes on to quote Marco Polo who recounts his visit to the Persian city of Saveh (in modern day Iran) - a great centre of the Zoroastrian religion. The Magi

were indeed astrologers and interpreters of dreams and until it was destroyed by Ghengis Khan, Saveh was the sight of one of the the most important astronomical observatories in Asia - if the Magi were looking for a star it would probably have been from here!

The Zoroastrians, like the Jews, were expecting the birth of a messiah to a virgin which would be heralded by a bright star. The significance of the gifts is slightly different to the later Christian understanding as well. The gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh are never mentioned together in the Old Testament but they are often mentioned together as Persian Pagan temple offerings. The meaning preserved by Marco Polo is that if the child accepted the Gold he would be an earthly King. If he accepted the Frankincense he would be Divine. If he accepted the Myrrh he would be a great physician. In this version of the tale, Jesus accepted all three.(notice that the significance of Myrrh is different from the classic western interpretation that it symbolises his mortality - here it symbolises *healing*). He is true King, true God and true Physician - the great healer.

That the Magi were Persian holy men was much better understood in ancient times than it is now. In the 7th century when the Persians invaded Palestine, burning and looting every important building they could find - only one was spared. The church of the nativity in Bethlehem had a mosaic of the Magi paying homage to Christ above the doorway, wearing classical Persian clothes. When the invaders saw it they left the church alone.

Also although the story has now become conflated with the Christmas story we overlook the fact that by the time the Magi arrived they found Jesus and his family living in a house (Matthew 2: 11), not in the stable, and from the fact that Herod wanted all boys of *two years old and under* killed (Matthew 2: 16) we can deduce that the visit probably happened up to two years after the actual birth.

Is Matthew recounting an actual historical event? Well as I have said before it is the symbolism and spiritual significance that is more important in all these things rather than historical accuracy, but nevertheless the overlap here with an actual community with Magi as their Holy men who studied the stars, the symbolic pagan offerings, their belief in a virgin birth of a messiah is quite overwhelming so there is a high probability that Matthew is recounting a real event.

Prayer for today

*Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our journey's end
in Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen*

Love and Peace

Martin