

MAGI

Eucharist, 5th January 2025

Texts: Isaiah 60, 1-6 & Matthew 2, 1-12.

Introduction

Today, as we begin a New Year and the season of Epiphany, our greatest wish, - our eternal hope must be for peace and harmony around the World in the coming Year. We have just heard Isaiah's words of encouragement for the Jewish aristocracy, - those who were exiled in Babylon for 70 years, before some of them returned to rebuild Jerusalem in 538 BC. And then Matthew's wonderful story of the visit of the mysterious Magi to the infant Jesus. If you look into the crib, - you will see that Jesus is now sitting up, taking notice of strangers, - and so should we! – They are our neighbours, to be greeted, - even to be loved!

Magi

The Magi, the Three Kings, or astrologers from the Orient, are only recorded in Matthew's Gospel. These grand Wisemen presented royal gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, to emphasise Jesus's World-wide royal status. Whereas in Luke's Gospel, the angels announced Jesus's birth to humble shepherds, - to be a successor to David, the Shepherd King of Israel. Matthew continued with the story of Herod's anger, and the slaughter of the innocents. And the Holy Family's escape of into Egypt. Egypt, from whence Moses led the enslaved Children of Israel a thousand years before, - all parts of the great Christian Story.

Children

Matthew's account may, or may not be true, however, it carries an important message for this, and for all time. The importance, and the vulnerability of children, - the precious rising generation that suffer so much in times political strife. A few miles to the West of Bethlehem, Gaza lies in ruins, where thousands of children have recently been killed, and continue to suffer, in Israel's brutal response to the terrorism of Hamas. We may wring our hands, as we see the cycle of recurring violence. Can we do more to resolve all this hatred, - as we claim to worship the Prince of Peace? – Jesus, whose authority was exercised with humility.

Resolutions

Traditionally New Year is a time for making resolutions, when we may decide to give up a personal indulgence, or much more importantly, to do something positive for those around us. Across the world, and especially in the Middle East, there are so many confrontations requiring resolution, so we should pray for dialogue, for peace and for harmony.

Mindsets

As we contemplate the many challenges of 2025, including the standing of the C of E, we may discern two types of political leaders; - those who selflessly serve their communities, and the self-obsessed despotic manipulators who grasp military and economic power. They are vulnerable, yet they hold us all to ransom. May they recognise their mortality, to amend their malign reputations, - to aspire to be remembered among the peacemakers. Noble Peacemakers and Nobel Prize-winners, like the late President Jimmy Carter who wrote, - *War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary. It is always an evil, never a good. We will never learn how to live together in peace by killing each other's children. The bond of our common humanity is stronger than the divisiveness of our fears and prejudices.* His strong faith inspired his naval career, his Presidency, and especially his later decades of active statesmanship, - working to benefit humanity across the World.

Conclusion

Jimmy Carter was a practical man who followed the annual cycle of life on his farm in Plains Georgia. Today, our gardens may look bleak and empty, but there is hope, the seeds and the bulbs that we planted are flourishing beneath the soil, unless the birds and the squirrels have found them! So, let us welcome the green shoots of hope, and pray that they may blossom, for the benefit of all in the coming Year.

May we nurture hope, and may our resolutions, and the resolve of those in authority work to serve God's peace, for all humankind. Adopting the Prophet Micah's exhortation, marked in the Carter's Family Bible: - *What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God*¹.
Amen

Words ~ 700

1. Micah 6, 8.