

Matthew 2:2 (NIV): 'We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.'

Back in March, when things went into lockdown for the first time, everything looked scary and bleak. Interestingly, during this time, online searches of the word 'prayer' went up by 50% and a record 5 million people tuned in to hear the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, lead an Easter Sunday service from his kitchen.

Events this past year have defined for all of us a new normal, and have seen people seeking Jesus in different ways. Without the presence of a church to attend, the search has gone online, and the gospel message has been spread further than ever before.

As the Magi travelled from Persia, now considered to be modern-day Iran, they possibly made some assumptions as to where Jesus might be found. Following the light of a star was the first step on their journey. Their visit to Herod, on the way to Bethlehem, seemed like a logical step – they were searching for a new king within a palace. These men, introduced to us in the Christmas story as wise, would have been highly educated and, to have brought the gifts they offered, would have been wealthy too. To honour a king, they assumed they would find answers in the palace.

It's so interesting how our earthly, human logic, is far inferior to the logic and wisdom of God - even if you are considered to be wise.

We know, in hindsight, that our King Jesus was not found in Herod's palace but in an outbuilding, amongst farm animals

The gifts the wise men brought were symbolic; the gold for kingship, the incense implying deity and the myrrh - an embalming oil representing His death.

In the first year of his life, Jesus was already drawing people from other nations to Him, and the very gifts they brought were symbolic of who He was, and the salvation through Him that was to follow.

The Magi sought out Jesus and found Him by following the light of a star in the darkness.

Everyone alive today needs a Saviour. For them to find light in the darkness, they need to be pointed to Jesus. What is so special about the Christmas story are the people that God chose to reveal Jesus to first. Mary and Joseph, the shepherds, the Kings and all those that surrounded them represented all layers of society, made equal at the feet of Jesus.

In the Nativity, the only status in the room that mattered was Jesus'.

On their return journey, the Magi must have known that the world would never be the same again, the new 'normal' that was to come brought suffering, but also redemption and restoration of God's people.

Our return journey into the 'new-normal' of life is a process of rebuilding and restoration too. The question is, as people seek this new normal, how will we as a church continue to shine the light of Jesus so that others can find Him?

John 8:12 (NIV): 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have eternal life

Questions to consider: When socially distanced and online services seem to have become the new normal, how does the church connect beyond the screen to help those who are searching for Jesus this Christmas?

Are there innovative ways that the congregation could serve your community, physically bringing Christmas and Christ to homes within your area?

Could we do what we do best – Love?

The Bible Society good news challenge is a kind of reverse advent calendar. Each day a little challenge is selected and random from a pot challenging you to do things like

- Get to know your neighbours
- Spend time as a family
- Phone or video call a friend or family member you haven't spoken to for a while and catch up.
- Bake or buy some biscuits or cupcakes to share with your neighbour
- Make lunch for someone who can't make it for themselves.

- Make a special thank you card for a star in your life.

We've missed half of advent now, but the challenge need not stop at Dec 25th. Count the 12 days of Christmas instead? We send that out with the notices this week.

Prayer *Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our light in the darkness. We pray, Lord God, that you would prepare us as a church to be ready for those seeking you. Thank you, Father, that even in the dark days of pandemic, people are looking for you and searching for you. We pray Father God that, just like the story of the lost sheep, you would seek out those who are lost and in need of you. Help us as a church to continue to love others as you love us, as we welcome new people into our congregation. We pray that this Christmas, this year, we will see more salvations, not just in our community but around the world. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the hope we have in you. In Jesus' name, Amen*

About Spurgeons Children's Charity



Through the delivery of support and intervention services, and by speaking up on behalf of those who need them most, Spurgeons give vulnerable children and families the chance for a better future.

In the year up to the end of March 2020, Spurgeons ran 50 projects and services which were delivered in 22 Local Authority areas across England.

This brought them into contact with 29,835 children and young people and 33,232 adult family members. Of these, they worked intensively with 3,095 children and young people to directly help them overcome the challenges they faced and reduced their vulnerability and disadvantage.

Children's Centres

Our Children's Centres offer support to any parent with a young family, providing spaces where we can tailor training, support and play sessions for families to thrive. At the heart of the community, our centres are known for caring, non-judgmental and practical support that is open to all families regardless of their background situation.

Over the lockdown months our Children's Centres have been actively checking in on vulnerable families by phone, providing fun sessions for children online, and have provided practical support for the families that we serve. Staff have also done many socially distanced doorstep visits to support families.

Please pray for our Children's Centres this Christmas. Some of the children that would attend our groups will be from families that cannot afford to buy presents. Pray that we do our very best to make sure each child receives a gift this year, and that each family receives the love and support they need.

Together for Families

Our Together for Families project aims to empower local churches to expand their services, to stand in the gap and support isolated and vulnerable families. We would value your partnership with us in prayer this Christmas, praying for our team that supports churches in making connections with vulnerable children. Please pray that we will have wisdom and that God will open doors for us to offer the best care we can.

Young Carers

There are an estimated 800,000 young carers across the UK who take on extra responsibilities when caring for close relatives and loved ones. Dispensing medication, doing the weekly shop, taking care of the washing, ironing and childcare are just some of the tasks taken on by children. Imagine then, the added stress and isolation that Covid-19 has brought to many of their lives, as well as the worry of shielding their vulnerable loved ones from further sickness or injury. Many children have become even more overwhelmed as support groups and meeting with friends has been restricted during lockdown. Our Young Carer projects across the UK are providing services and support to some of these children, giving them the space they need to be a child. By providing whole family support, and space to listen, we are helping relieve the pressure felt by young carers across the country and letting them know they are not alone