

They Came to Worship Him

Luke 2.8-20 and Matt. 2.1-12

Luke 2.8-20. Shepherds were despised by the religious people of the day. They could not keep all the details of the ceremonial law, all the hand washings and other rules and regulations. Yet it was to them that the angels came and sang. It is a lovely thought that they may have been those who looked after the sacrificial Temple lambs and they were the first visitors to see the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

If Jesus had been born in Nazareth the local musicians would, as custom had it, have come to the house with music and song. But Jesus was born at Bethlehem, away from home, so the angels of heaven took the place of the earthly singers and sang for the Saviour's birth.

Matthew 2.1-12. We usually think of Mary and Joseph coming to our modern idea of an inn in Bethlehem. We imagine the owner of the inn saying he was sorry but the inn was full and the only space they had was in the stables round at the back.

However, Justin Martyr (about 150 AD) tells us that it was not as we today picture it at all. The inn was just a wayside cave in Bethlehem where travellers could rest for the night. It had two levels – one for the animals and a higher one for people. There was no innkeeper. The higher part was full when Mary and Joseph arrived so the Son of God was born among the animals in the lower part.

When the Lord of Glory came to this earth He was born in a wayside cave.

But there were wise men from the East (probably Persia) – men skilled in their day in philosophy, medicine and natural science. They had seen a brilliant new star in the East and took it to mean the coming of an extraordinary and great king, one who would bring in a new age for mankind. So they set out on their great journey to find Him and acknowledge Him. The idea that there were three of them comes from the fact that three gifts are mentioned – gold for a king, frankincense for a priest, myrrh for One who was to die – gifts for the One who is King, our High Priest and our Saviour.

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the most memorable Christmas you have had and why?
2. Christmas is to celebrate the coming of God's Son in love and humility. How much do you think our Christmas celebrations reflect that?
3. Jesus could have come to earth with twelve legions of angels accompanying Him in power and glory. Why do you think He came as a babe and one born in such humble circumstances?
4. What is your favourite carol and why?