

A World Reunited (Carol Service)

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Date: 24 December 2023

Preacher: Donald Smith

- [0 : 0 0] Thank you, Gregor. Christmas is a time that brings people together like no other, isn't it? Even just looking around here this evening, many of you are probably here because you've come to be with family. Children arrive home for the holidays, grandparents visit, friends come over.
- Families gather around the table. It is a time when people come together. And so it's probably not a surprise, is it, to hear that people came together near the time of the first Christmas too.
- But what is surprising is who came together. If you noticed in that passage Gregor just read from us from Matthew chapter 2, we're introduced to the Magi, traditionally called the wise men, from somewhere off in the east.
- We don't know a whole lot about them. We don't know exactly where they're from. We don't know exactly how many of them there were. We do know they came bearing three gifts. And we know they came to the house of Mary and Joseph.
- [1 : 2 1] And as with many great stories, when we read them over and over again, we can become almost over-familiar, can't we?
- I know this one. The Magi visit Mary. They give their gold frankincense and myrrh before heading off on their merry way. But the Magi visit Mary.
- The Magi visit Mary. I don't know if you're expecting anyone over to your house for Christmas tomorrow. Maybe you're going somewhere else.
- How would you react if there was a knock on the door and you went and opened it and there on your doorstep were a group of wealthy pagan astronomers from a foreign country?
- Mary. I'm betting you'd be quite surprised, wouldn't you? Who are you? Where have you come from? How did you get here? We'd be surprised, wouldn't we?
- [2 : 2 6] Here's the thing, though. I don't think Mary would have been much less surprised. Who are you? Where have you come from? And how on earth did you end up here?
- Not only because they weren't expected, but simply because of who they were. The Magi were wealthy.
- Mary was very poor. Mary, as far as we know, had no schooling whatsoever. The Magi were highly educated. The Magi were advisors to kings.
- Mary was from a nothing town called Nazareth that nobody cared about. The Magi were from a land that worshipped pagan gods.
- Mary was an Israelite, the equivalent of someone who spent their life growing up in church. Mary spoke Aramaic. The Magi almost certainly didn't know a word of it.
- [3 : 2 7] In the eyes of the world, one was rich, respected and educated. The other was poor, irrelevant and a peasant.
- Here were two people, two groups of people that in the eyes of the world could not have been further apart from each other. They did not belong under the same roof.

To any of their contemporaries, any of the people around at the time, there was no conceivable circumstance in which Magi from the East and a young girl called Mary from Nazareth would end up in the same room at the same time.

They lived different lives in different worlds. And that's the way everyone would have expected it to continue for the rest of their lives.

But then a child was born. And everything changed forever. Because that child came for everyone.

[4 : 54] Perhaps this evening is your first time in church. And you feel like you're not really sure what you're doing here. Maybe it's your thousandth service that you've come to.

Either way, Jesus came for you. And both of you are as welcome to come to him and as welcome to be part of his family as each other.

Perhaps you, like the Magi, are wealthy with a good job and a happy family. Maybe you're here this evening battling an addiction that you cannot escape from.

Maybe you've lost your family or your home. Or you're worried you're going to lose them all. Whichever one of those two extremes is you, Jesus came for both of you.

He welcomes everyone equally. We live in a world, don't we? It certainly feels like it's becoming increasingly divided and polarized.

[6 : 06] But Christmas brings people together. Not just around a table on a Monday in December. But Christmas, the coming of Jesus into the world, brings people together that otherwise would never be found and or near one another.

Mary and the Magi ended up under the same roof. Because they both love Jesus. Jesus, Christianity, the church, is not for a certain kind of person.

It's not for people from a specific background. It's not for people who look a certain way or speak a certain language. It's certainly not for good people who look like they have it all together.

Church is not for good people. It is for broken people. Jesus did not come for the healthy, but for the sick.

He came for people who are lost. And if you know that's you, then wherever you have come from, wherever you are in life right now, Jesus came for you.

[7 : 25] That is the only condition for entry into his family gathering this Christmas.

And when you come in, if you come in, please come in. You will find a home and a family that this world simply cannot offer.

Because where the world is full of division, Jesus' family is just that. It is a family to belong to forever.

Where you are cared and loved for. By Jesus himself and by all of his people. No matter where you are in life, no matter what you think you deserve.

This family is for everyone. That is the wonderful message of Christmas. That is the wonderful truth we see as the Magi and Mary come together.

[8 : 32] This is a hope that is extended to everyone. All we need to do is admit that we too are lost.

Sinners who need saved. By God become man. That is the wonderful hope we celebrate. And that is just a very short, very feeble attempt to explain some of the wonder of Christmas and of Jesus.

Know that there is so much more. But also know that you do not need to know anymore. Or be anything different. In order to come to him.

Because he brings people in. He gathers from every tongue, tribe and nation. That is what he came to do.

That is what he is doing right now. And that is part of what we get to celebrate. As we remember his birth tomorrow. Let me say a quick word of prayer before we sing our final carol together.

[9 : 45] Father, we thank you so much. That Jesus came for the lost. That he came for Mary. That he came for the Magi. That he came for the Jews and the Gentiles.

The slaves and the free. Whoever we are. Wherever we are. We thank you, Father, that Jesus came for us. And that he will welcome us into our family.

If we confess our need for him. And put our trust in him. To bring us life. In his most precious name we pray. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.