

Thought for the Day

Thought for the day is based on one of the day's lectionary readings.

For the Bible online, go to: <http://bible.oremus.org/>

Choose your version (we use NRSV in church)

Copy and paste the reference into the search box and the passage will be displayed.

Saturday 2nd January

Isaiah 60.1-12

'Nations shall come to your light, and kings to your dawning brightness. They shall bring gold and frankincense'.

This prophecy some centuries before Christ forms a background to the story of the wise men which Matthew, the most Jewish of the gospel writers, includes in his nativity cycle. Isaiah was speaking of the reversal of the fortunes of God's people; they had been defeated and taken into exile but they would be restored to God's favour and to freedom, returning to Jerusalem to rebuild; and they would then become greater than they had been even in the golden age of King David in the distant past. They would be respected by other nations instead of being the scorn of all. Their wealth would be restored as of old.

When the Christian tradition developed, these expectations became linked to Jesus as the universal Saviour, uniting Jews and Gentiles within the church, in a gospel which quickly spanned all the nations within the Roman Empire.

Prophecy was believed to have more than one level of fulfilment and whatever happened at the period when this was originally written to validate the prophet as a true messenger from God, that did not rule out further fulfilments in the future. Hence Matthew's community would have seen the link with Magi from the east bringing treasures.

Actually we know from Acts that the Gentile mission was not without opposition and it took some time for the church to fully embrace that inclusive and universal approach. Indeed, one could say, we have not yet achieved full inclusivity. But it was foreshadowed here in the OT and again in Matthew's story of the Magi.

The point of Isaiah's prophecy though is that these foreign kings flocking in were not being coerced through political power or by violence; no, they were attracted by the light of Israel. By the understanding of God and the nature of God that they found there.

Like moths flying into a lamp at night they could hardly help themselves. The dawning brightness was a lovely thing and would draw people towards it like a magnet.

Perhaps this was the experience of the Magi seeing the great star – it was irresistible.

It must have been the experience of the disciples called by Jesus to follow him; they could hardly help themselves, it was the best thing that had ever happened to them, they could not imagine anyone better to follow. His charisma, his presence, was where they wanted to be, despite the risks.

It is the experience of many ever since who find God in Christ; not a God of fear and control and coercion, but a God of love and compassion, of light and beauty, and goodness and truth, of all that feeds the human spirit and makes us more fully alive.

Jesus told a parable of a person finding treasure in a field, then selling all they had to buy that field and its treasure. It was a parable about the kingdom of God. Something that is so attractive, so lovely, that when we discover it, it is worth more than anything else in life. We are irresistibly drawn to it.

In the fourth Gospel Jesus says: 'I, when I am lifted up, will draw all people to me.' This was not a boast; it was not hubris; he was alluding to being lifted up on the cross. Isaiah's vision from hundreds of years before, fulfilled in a way he could never even have dreamt of.

*Keep us, good Lord, under the shadow of your mercy in this time of uncertainty and distress.
Sustain and support the anxious and fearful, and lift up all who are brought low;
that we may rejoice in your comfort,
knowing that nothing can separate us from your love
in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.*