

# Sunday 21st December 2025 - Advent: Truth, Meaning, Purpose

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Date: 21 December 2025

Preacher: Kim Thomas

[0:00] Thank you, Laura. Good morning, everyone. It's lovely to be here. Now, you know, we're not a formal church, are we? The clergy don't wear vestments and things like that. But normally when I preach, I would wear a dress because dresses don't come out very often in my wardrobe.

So I would normally wear a dress. But today I couldn't because my best friend gave me this T-shirt and it's got the three wise men and camels on it.

And they've all got sunglasses, including the camels. And it goes, tonight we ride. And I thought she only gave it me the other day and she didn't know what I was preaching on today.

And guess what I'm going to preach on? I'm going to preach on the wise men today. So I thought, well, I'm sorry, I've got to go a bit casual this morning because I've got to wear this.

So thanks, Viv. Good one. OK, so we are continuing our journey through the Christmas story.

We've been hearing some great things, haven't we? We've been hearing some myths busted as we go along.

[1:10] It's been fascinating as we're going along. And this week I've called this The Quest. Sounds like a game show, doesn't it? Now, we've heard about Elizabeth, who's the mother of John the Baptist, who in her old age became pregnant and gave birth to John the Baptist.

And this is a picture of her there with Mary, the mother of Jesus, because we heard also about Mary. And this is the moment of joy, isn't it? When the baby leapt in Mary's womb.

And I just think that's just wonderful, wonderful that is. And then at the carol service, we heard from Ian about the shepherds. And now we're up to the wise men.

The wise men. Now, think about a school nativity. I'm sure some of you have been to a school nativity. Sadly, my grandchildren are too old now. And they don't do nativities, which I think is a real shame.

But there again, you know, I have seen lots of them. And in my former working life, I saw so many nativities. I think I could have done it all myself. And a nativity wouldn't be the same, would it, without a wise man or two or three.

[2:30] And, you know, you see these kids trundling on and they're bringing all these highly inappropriate gifts to a little baby. And much has been said about these gift givers.

Now, much has been said about them, but also many jokes have been told about them. Like this one that says, what does it say? Just admit it, we're lost.

There's always got to be an Aussie theme in my preaching. And, of course, this one's quite the old one, right? We've picked up the gold and the myrrh.

What on earth is that? But I was showing my grandchildren this last night because we had a tractor running in Litchfield.

And we went to see it. And I was showing the grandchildren because they were asking about me preaching today. And George, the 12-year-old who's autistic, said, But, Grandma, you do know, don't you, that Frankenstein was actually the person who invented the monster.

[3:36] So he had to unpick the picture. But never mind. So, yeah, we've heard lots and lots of stories, haven't we, about the three wise men, about the gifts they bought, about everything that went on.

But things are not always what they seem. Now, we've been hearing that over the last few weeks, haven't we? Things are not always what they seem or what we've been used to. But, as the great writer Mark Twain said, Never let the truth get in the way of a good story. Now, one of the stories I think about is the story, obviously, of the Magi. The three, well, we've said three kings.

It's because they bring in three gifts. That's why they've always been three kings. But there was obviously a lot more. But these people set out from a foreign land far, far away. Sound like a Star Trek, no, Star Wars movie now. Far, far away. They've come. They're following a star because they're on a quest. And that's why the first slide said quest.

[4:41] But I think they were looking for much more than just bringing gifts to a baby. I think their quest was for a quest for truth and maybe a quest for meaning and maybe a quest for purpose.

Now, isn't that often what we have in our lives? Sometimes when we have these deep moments where we think about what we're doing and where we're going, we want to think about the truth in our lives.

We want to think about the meaning of our lives. We want to think about the purpose in our lives. Well, these people, these Magi, they have come from the east and they are on a quest.

They're trying to find something. All we know is that the direction that they came from, which was the east, and they turned up the palace at the palace of Herod.

Herod, who was self-styled the great. Now, can you imagine what kind of person he was if he calls himself the great? You know, you can just imagine what sort of man he was, couldn't you?

[5:52] So let's have a look at what the Bible says about this story. After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, Where is the one who has been born King of the Jews?

We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him. When King Herod heard this, he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.

In Bethlehem in Judea, they replied, for this is what the prophet has written. But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, Go and search carefully for the child.

As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him. After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose, went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was.

[7:24] When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him.

Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

So, first place that the Magi go to is a palace, a royal palace, a palace that is beautiful, that is huge. They go to see Herod, like I say, self-styled the great. Now, Herod was not even born a Jew, much less a king. He was an Edomite, and historically, Edomites were the greatest enemies of Israel. Now, he was made a king by the Romans. Everybody needed to be put in their place. Everybody needed to be controlled in those days, and that's what Herod was there to do.

[8:34] So, you can imagine Herod's surprise, can't you, when an envoy of people arrive at this big palace, looking to see, or asking to see, the one who was born the king of the Jews.

Well, Herod would know that wasn't him, and this is somebody they're asking, who was born the king of the Jews? Not Herod. So, there's a subtle, but a big difference between somebody who says that they're the king of the Jews, somebody who the Romans have said they're the king of the Jews, and somebody who was born the king of the Jews.

Here were people who looked for royalty, not made by human, but by divine birth. Now, one of the things the Magi said, which I think was interesting, was we've come to worship him. Now, why did they say that? Why did they say they'd come to worship this child, this baby born king of the Jews? Did they say it because they thought they were in a great palace, and they were, and this was what Herod would want to hear?

Did they think that he was going to be the father? Did they think, oh, yes, okay, we'll say we've come because we've come to worship him. Who knows? The truth of the matter was that by them saying they'd come to worship the one born king of the Jews, they probably made Herod even angrier than he was in the first place.

[10:03] Here were these non-Jewish astrologers claiming they'd come to worship the king of the Jews. Now, understanding their message, their mistake, these truth seekers then journeyed on.

Encouraged by Herod, who had a plot, a cunning plot, a plot in the back of his mind, which was more than truth. Herod wanted to find out information because here was a danger signal.

Here was something that could upset the status quo of the area that they were in. He was more concerned with his position and his reputation than actually finding the truth.

But the Magi, although they'd made a mistake, they were seeking for the truth. They didn't let a little mistake or even a big mistake stop them in their quest for truth.

Now, that made me wonder how many times I've given up on something. How many times have I given up on something because I've made a mistake? Because I've got it wrong?

[11:11] Because I didn't think that what I'd done was right? How many times have I given up? How many times have we given up on something because we'd made a mistake?

How many opportunities had I missed because I was frightened of making a mistake? And I have to say, it doesn't get any easier when you get older.

You know, you grow up and you think, oh, I'm full of wisdom, full of age, full of wisdom. And then you think, oh, how did I do that again? How did I make that mistake again? And sometimes mistakes make us stop doing what we're doing in our search for the truth.

Now, one of the mistakes that is made in the story of the birth of Jesus or one of the misunderstandings was that he was newborn.

Even in that clip we saw, he was a little baby that the magi were coming to visit. And this is the image that we have, isn't it? Is that these three wise men come and they visit the baby in the manger.

[12:20] It's a lovely, comforting, wonderful picture, isn't it? But this is probably more the reality. It was probably a toddler because if you remember from the rest of the story, it doesn't get much better really because Herod then demands the death of all boys under the age of two.

So he sends people out to slaughter all the children under the age of two looking for this child. So he was probably a toddler.

But by the time the magi finally got to Bethlehem, Jesus and his family were living in a house. And then Herod had told them, hadn't he?

Herod had told them that they were to go and tell him where the child was. Not because they, as he said, I want to worship him, but because he wanted to kill him.

But the magi, as we heard in the clip, decided that they would go home another way. So they changed their plans. So sometimes a mistake leads to a wonderful thing and it might lead to a change of plans.

[13:36] So they had open minds. It was obvious that they did. And their mistake turned out to be a learning opportunity.

And I think that's one of the things that we can learn from this story as well is sometimes when we fail, we pick ourselves up again and we learn. And again, as I say, as you get older, it doesn't always get better because sometimes I'll go, how did I get myself into this situation yet again? So, you know, often we find ourselves saying, how do we get here again? And it takes us more than once to learn from our mistakes. And as we know, some people never do. So the other thing I think that these men were looking for, these people were looking for, was meaning.

was meaning in the journey. So they'd seen a new star rising. They thought they knew what it signified. It signified a great and glorious birth.

Isn't that lovely? In that clip that we read, it was heard, we were saying that, you know, a star rose up and they followed the star. I think that's wonderful.

[14:52] That's wonderful. And the Magi probably thought, yeah, well, okay, we've got to follow this star, but what does it mean? What does it mean? They had some idea, didn't they? We've come to worship the King of the Jews.

But they were following the star, not knowing exactly what it meant. They knew a new king had been born and they meant to worship him. And all their readings, their knowledge, their experience had led them to the understanding that what had occurred was a phenomenal event.

And they wanted to find the meaning to everything they'd learned. They knew what they were going to do when they found Jesus. They were going to bow down and worship him.

But I'm sure the significance of what they were doing didn't truly sink in until they got to Bethlehem. Who would they worship? Why were they so driven to find him? We often are driven to find, by a quest to find meaning in our lives and the reason that we're on earth.

And it's a question that many human beings ask. And I was asking myself when I was preparing for this sermon, I was asking myself about, you know, what do I do for the quest for meaning, for the quest for life?

[16:11] What have I done in my life? And do you know what? I was thinking, I have done so many things where I've just gone off and just followed what I thought was the right thing to do, not really having a clue about what was going on.

I mean, most of my life has been, oh, well, that seems like a good idea. I think I'll give it a go. And that's what most of my life has been like, literally. When I was 18 and a half, I decided I would just go off from living in the Midlands down to Kent to join Kent Police Force.

Why? Well, because I'd met somebody who was in Kent Police Force and it seemed like a really good thing to do. But I really didn't have a clue. I didn't know anybody. I didn't have a clue what I was going to do.

I didn't even know if I was going to be a good copper. But I went because I wanted to find out. I'm nosy. I wanted to know. And then, so I went down there and I remember being interviewed by an assistant chief constable and he goes, you're so young.

You're only, I mean, I was interviewed at 18. You're 18. You're coming down here. You don't know anybody. You don't know the area. What are you going to do? And I said, I don't know. I'll make friends.

[17:32] I'll find people to be friends with, you know. I'll make my own family down here. And then, and this was a strange thing that I said because I believed in God. I really did truly believe in God.

But I wasn't a Christian. I didn't have that personal understanding of Jesus in my life. But I said to him, of course, I've always got God with me.

And it was like, what? And I still got in. I mean, that's amazing, isn't it? So I think there was something, there was something truthful about what I said to that man because he said to me, right, okay, well, we'll have you, but I can almost guarantee you're not going to be here any longer than two years.

And I said, oh, right, okay, thank you, thinking, okay, is that a good thing or a bad thing? And I met him again some years later when I was at police headquarters.

And he looked at me and he goes, don't I know you? And I said, well, you interviewed me for the job ages ago. And he said, oh, right, okay. He said, what did I say to you?

[18:40] He said, I said, well, you told me that you'd have me, but you didn't think I'd be in any longer. And he goes, any longer than two years. And he said, oh, right, okay. He said, anyway, what are you doing up here?

My 15-year refresher course. So, so he was wrong. And just by saying that he would have me, I thought, oh, well, that's okay.

We'll, you know, we'll go down there. We'll go. And, but I hadn't got a clue. I was just looking for meaning. I was looking for a purpose. I was just looking for something. And I think the Magi were a lot like that as well. They set off on a journey to find one thing and found something way more than they expected. But of course, they had a purpose. And that was the third thing. They had a purpose when they set off. And their purpose, I suspect, changed when they met Jesus. They started as seekers, but when they found him, they became worshippers.

[19:41] They brought themselves the very best they had and literally offered it to Jesus. Their gifts represented not so much who they were because this was no longer about them, but about who he is, about who Jesus is.

The first gift, as we know, was gold, an acknowledgement of God's royalty. When they found him, surely, they realised that this child in humble surroundings was different.

Did they think, oh, we've definitely made a mistake? We've definitely made a mistake. We are coming to these humble surroundings, to this house. We're bringing gold. Have we made a mistake?

But, they didn't take it back. Not like the Monty Python sketch. They didn't take it back. They gave it to the King of King and the Lords of Lords.

If they didn't think that he was the one that they would come to seek, why did they leave the gifts? They left the gifts because they met with Jesus. And like so many people, their lives were changed because they met with Jesus.

[20:55] So the second thing they gave was frankincense because he is God. When their quest was over, they saw the Son of God.

The word for offering that is used here is used seven more times in the New Testament. And it's always in a religious sense. So that word of when they offered him gifts, it's about an offering of worship.

And finally, they gave him myrrh because of his humanity. He who has always been God was human. He became human.

He came to earth. Now, when the Magi's quest was over, they saw the Son of Man. The end of their quest was over. They had found the purpose that they set off for.

And it was completely different, I think, to how they started. And their ears were open when they got to meet with the living Lord.

[21:59] Their ears were open because they took notice of a dream and went off in a different direction to go home rather than going back and telling Herod what they'd found.

Meeting with the Lord Jesus, even as a small child, changed them so much that it changed the trajectory of their journey. They'd got, they'd finally got to the purpose of that journey and then went home by a different route.

don't be frustrated if your route is different to the way you'd planned it. Don't be frustrated if you start off to do something and it doesn't quite work out how you thought.

Please open your heart to that living Lord who will, as he did with the Magi, change your purpose. Now, as I said, not a single sermon would go by without me mentioning in Australia.

I went out to Australia to live and I thought that was it for good. I thought I would live in Australia for the rest of my life.

[23:12] I loved it there. I had the most amazing job. I was a school chaplain. I got to talk to kids all the time. I loved it. They even let me buy a dog, well it was a gift actually, a dog, to be the school dog and he lived with me and I loved it.

I absolutely loved it. It was the best job in the world. Talk about it saved the best till last. But then my purpose changed, my sense, my journey changed. After COVID I realised what was really, really important and as much as I loved living in Australia, I became a citizen.

As much as I loved it, I felt it was more important to come home back to the UK to be with my family, to be with my grandchildren who, you know, some of you see, to be with my grandchildren, to be that steady hand and influence in their lives and it broke my heart but it was the best decision I ever made.

but you see, I'd got my life planned out. I decided and God had called me out to Australia. God had called me to work out there but I also think he said, it's time to go home now, Kim and I had to change my plan, my purpose, everything.

I had to change it to come back to the UK. Don't be afraid if you think your life is going off in a different trajectory to the one you'd planned.

[24:45] but be like those Magi. They knelt down, they worshipped Jesus because they recognised who he is.

They recognised who he is and they bowed down and they worshipped him, they offered him gifts as an act of worship to him.

I bet they never ever forgot that experience. I mean, we still talk about it now, don't we?

We still talk about that experience of what those travellers did. and I think of all of everything of our lives, however long, however short it is.

I've just lost a friend at 93 years old and he lived his life to the full and his funeral was amazing. It was huge. There were so many people there at 93 years old but his life was filled with love.

[25:52] His life was filled with purpose and focus but he was also very flexible and he knew the Lord and God calls us to that same life of discovery, a life of truth, of meaning and of purpose and we can only wonder at it.

We can only wonder at it and trust and believe and from that trust and from that belief truth will flow, love will flow, belief will flow.

Now Christina Rossetti wrote this beautiful poem, I love it and it talks about Jesus' birth, love came down at Christmas.

Love came down at Christmas, love all lovely, love divine, love was born at Christmas, star and angels gave the sign, worship we the Godhead, love incarnate, love divine, worship we our Jesus but wherewith for sacred sign.

Love shall be our token, love be yours and love be mine, love to God and all men, love for plea and gift and sign.

[27:12] May that love, the love of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit fill you with life, with love, with awe and with wonder not just as we think about this Christmas story, not just as we think about the Magi who brought the gifts to Jesus, bring your gift every day to Jesus for you all have so many amazing gifts, bring that gift as small as it is to Jesus and know that love came down at Christmas.

What the Magi found, we find too. In amongst all the noise and the bustle and everything of Christmas, love is the centre.

Please hang on to that through this silly season when it's so busy. Love is everything because love is Jesus. Amen.