**BOXING DAY SERMON 26/12/2021**

**WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR Matthew 2:1-12, John 1:29-42**

What are you looking for?

We are all searching for something

The Christmas story is full of people in search for something….

Elizabeth and Zechariah – in search for a family

Mary – in search for a loving husband, secure and respectable life,

Joseph – in search for a faithful wife

Shepherds – in search for the baby Messiah of which the angels spoke

Wisemen – in search for the fulfilment of their life long study

now revealed in the stars

Herod in search for his rival

Everyone in this story, So often in the gospels that follow…

In all stories… there is a search for something

Life is a search

A search for meaning, for connection, for peace, for salvation, for hope…

I was having dinner with a friend last week and our conversation turned to our search.

What is life about?

What do we seek and long for and want more than anything else.

For Him it was happiness.

We talked about this for a while.

It is a reasonable search.

But is happiness possible to find?

Is it worth finding?

Or is there something more, something better?

We are all searching for something.

Some of us do it by investing in our kids

Others seek success in their sport

Some seek significance in their employment

Others satisfaction through relationships…

What are you looking for? PAUSE

SLOWLY Have you come today as part of your search?

Are you prepared to find it today? PAUSE

Almost no one in the Christmas story found what they were looking for

Except they did.

It’s just that what they found wasn’t want they expected!

And yet, what they found was something, someone

far greater than what they were searching for.

Something, someone very different from what they thought possible.

Instead of a happy family – Elizabeth & Zechaiah had the greatest prophet of all time

The one who prepared the way for God’s promised Messiah

And Mary – instead of a respectable life – she became a young unmarried mother – shamed – yet honoured!

And Joseph – he married a woman carrying someone else’s child

God’s Son – if you are able to believe that!

And the Shepherds – instead of a royal prince in a palace – they found a baby wrapped in strips of cloth and lying in an animal feed trough

And Herod – well in a strange twist – he never found what he was looking for.

Even though what he was looking for would threaten and usurp his power.

And the wise men, the magi, these mysterious men from somewhere East

and the focus of today’s reading…

They found a king who wasn’t expecting them

And then they found the object of their search

Who turned out to be a small child living with his parents in a house

in a small hick town called Bethlehem…

but they were wise enough to recognise him

FOR This Child was not just any child – but God’s promised redeemer

Gods rescuer, ruler and King.

And this they symbolised by the gifts they gave.

Looking, seeking, finding, seeing…

are repeated time and time again in this opening story.

Over and over again these themes recur…

and not just in this story but in all the stories we have about Jesus.

“I saw the Spirit,” John says after a dove descends on the newly baptized Jesus.

And again: “I myself have seen and have testified.”

“*Look,* here is the Lamb of God!” he tells his disciples the next day.

And then Jesus “turns and sees” those same disciples,

and invites them to “come and see” where he’s staying.

Later, Andrew tells his brother Simon that he has “found” the Messiah.

The passage ends with Jesus *looking*at Simon before renaming him.

But all that occurs, only after Jesus asks a deep and penetrating question:

“What are you looking for?”

a question we would do well to ask ourselves: “What are you looking for?”

This is the first recorded question Jesus asks his disciples,

It’s a question it we could ask all those who are a part of the Christmas story

 It’s certainly a question appropriate for the wise men of today’s story

And I believe it’s a good question for today:*What are you looking for?*

In your heart, in your secret and quiet places:

what are the hungers that drive you forward?

What is it that causes you to get up in the morning,

or keep going when its really tough?

As you say goodbye to an old year and welcome a new one,

What are you hoping for, asking for, looking for?  Do you know?

What do you really want?

I’ve been mulling over this question all week.

But not just in the “normal” things I do…

Work , hang out with friends and family, play sport, eat, shop…

But in my spiritual places. In my relationship with God.

When I come to church,

when I pray,

when I open the pages of Scripture,

what am I looking for?

Am I looking for *anything*, Am I expecting to find something?

And if I am – what am I hoping for?

Am I looking for God – or just what God can give me?

Do I want Him?

To know Him, to delight in Him to experience the freedom of submitting to Him…

Or do I just want him to bless my plans,

improve my life,

make the things I do successful?

When Jesus asked his disciples: “What do you want?” they dodged the question

The shepherds didn’t know what to expect

Mary and Joseph probably wanted anything but what they got

And Zechariah and Elizabeth got more than they bargained for…

And the wiseman… well the wisemen – they head to the seat of power,

the headquarters of the community,

to Herod in his palace…

Because, perhaps, like us, they don’t quite know what they were looking for.

Where to look or what to expect.

But having taken a wrong turn

Followed their head – rather than their heart.

Done what was sensible, rather than continued following the star…

the very thing that had brought them on the search to begin with…

Having been lead astray – they got back on the horse, and continued their search…

They kept on looking.

Until the star stopped.

They reached their destination

And, we are told, I love this, “they were overjoyed”

Going into the house

Finding Mary with her child – they then bowed down and worshipped Him

This is what is being offered to each of us today.

The object of your search has come.

He is here waiting to be found.

But we have to keep seeking – until we find Him.

Until we find Jesus. The real Jesus. Saviour Jesus. King Jesus.

And when we do – our response, the only appropriate thing to do…

Is to worship Him

Is to bow down and give him his due

To give him our allegiance. Our lives.

But it begins with being certain of what we are looking for.

we need to be clear.

We need to know what we are doing.

We need to be convinced of the question we are asking.

Is it Jesus?  Or something else?

CONCLUSION

Looking.  Seeing.  Searching. Finding.

These themes are repeated time and time again in the familiar Christmas stories

Throughout the gospels.

Not once, but over and over again.

This is the heart of what it means to follow Him. To find life.

Because in the end our faith, life, the Christian life…

is not ultimately about what we know

But about who we seek

About pursuing Jesus

So as this year draws to an end – for which many of us may say “Thank goodness”

And as we look to a new year with its fears and uncertainties, hopes and dreams.

Lets cultivate our desire to seek

A willingness to look.

A longing to find

And let’s not be satisfied with pursuing anything less than Jesus

When Jesus was asked by his disciples “Where are you staying?”

his response was “come and see”.

That is also his invitation to us.

When the wisemen thought they had reached their destination – the palace.

They discovered they had taken a wrong turn – they needed to set out again,

and keep following the star.

 Which they did until they found what they were looking for

 Jesus

We too need to keep seeking…

Keep searching until we find Jesus

To come and see.

To be satisfied with nothing less than finding our satisfaction in Him

and Him alone.

So what are you looking for?