

## **Isaiah 60:1-6**

### **The Ingathering of the Dispersed**

*60 Arise, shine; for your light has come,  
and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you.*

*<sup>2</sup> For darkness shall cover the earth,  
and thick darkness the peoples;  
but the LORD will arise upon you,  
and his glory will appear over you.*

*<sup>3</sup> Nations shall come to your light,  
and kings to the brightness of your dawn.*

*<sup>4</sup> Lift up your eyes and look around;  
they all gather together, they come to you;  
your sons shall come from far away,  
and your daughters shall be carried on their nurses' arms.*

*<sup>5</sup> Then you shall see and be radiant;  
your heart shall thrill and rejoice,  
because the abundance of the sea shall be brought to you,  
the wealth of the nations shall come to you.*

*<sup>6</sup> A multitude of camels shall cover you,  
the young camels of Midian and Ephah;  
all those from Sheba shall come.  
They shall bring gold and frankincense,  
and shall proclaim the praise of the LORD.*

## **Matthew 2:1-12**

### **The Magi Visit the Messiah**

*2 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem <sup>2</sup> 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."*

*<sup>3</sup> When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> "In Bethlehem in Judea," they replied, "for this is what the prophet has written:*

*<sup>6</sup> "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."*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. <sup>8</sup> 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."*

*<sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. <sup>11</sup> On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. <sup>12</sup> And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.*

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If you have ever started a project it's as well to have a plan. If you are knitting a jumper – then you need a pattern; if you are making a cupboard, then some measurements and an idea of the finished piece would be good. If you are planting a vegetable garden that will be successful, you need seeds, tools and the space available. If you are building a building, then one of the vital beginning requirements is to have a plan and drawings.

My husband was a building engineer, so I learnt the term *topping out*. This is a ceremony which takes place when the last piece of construction is completed, and all who have been involved in the building celebrate that their labours – they have come to a significant point in the finishing of the building. A drop of beer or a full-scale media event perhaps.

The original plan may have had to have some adjustments, and the topping out isn't the end of the job. All the internal work needs to be finished, and that may take a long time for complicated building.

When God created human beings as the climax to all his other creation, He had a plan, and that was for human beings to be in a loving, worshipping relationship with Him. It was a big setback when human beings didn't choose to want that themselves – but wanted to go their own way.

But God didn't give up. Abraham received the promise "I will make of you a great nation, .....so that you will be a blessing; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed..."

To Moses, God gave the commandments to help the plan along.

As the centuries went by, God's plan had to keep including reminders of his original promises, for his chosen people decided their own plan could be better.

Isaiah came with many messages of how God's plan would come about, and in the passage we heard it was to repeat the part that everyone, from everywhere, should be included. The master plan wasn't just for a small group of people.

So in one way God sending his son Jesus was the master stroke of the plan. The last piece of construction.

Into this world God sent his son Jesus with a message of peace, hope, love and joy, available to each person's heart.

He came himself to show how we could live in a loving relationship with God.

His plan had come to a significant point – fruition. *The word with God from the beginning became flesh and dwelt amongst us.*

Yet the plan had a long way to go.

But this was the point where we can imagine the topping out ceremony of heaven takes place.

The angels sang to the shepherds to announce to the people of Israel, high or low, outcast or despised, this Messiah was for them - but also God sent Gentiles to worship his son in accordance with his

promises that all the world would be blessed through his people Israel.

We know the story of following that star –they were pagan astrologers who put their trust in the stars – God can overrule anything. Magi – the word used in Matthew, is the root of the word *magician*. Their journey from the east – the pictures have grown up around them, the camels, their names, their colour - what we do know is that they came from afar prepared to worship a God king.

Of course, they first went to Jerusalem and Herod's palace expecting that this would be where they would find a king. This Herod was an old man by now and had many enemies. He was also paranoid about the tribes from the east and losing his throne. He was an outsider too. You notice how he asked "the *people's* chief priests and teachers of the law".

His plot to destroy this new born king went astray – again God overruled and kept Jesus safe.

The magi and found a carpenter's son in a humble dwelling. The chances are they were not there in the stable by then. Joseph may have found work once the census rush was over – he would have had tools with him. So when God warned Joseph in adream to take his family to Egypt, Joseph would have been able to do so and work as he went along – quite apart from having the cushion of rich gifts the magi brought.

Those gifts as symbols of Jesus as king, Jesus as God worshipped with incense and myrrh to anoint at his death are significant – as symbols of who Jesus was – but I always hope they were a great help to keep the family safe as they travelled.

So, God's topping out ceremony could be said to be the foreign magi coming to visit Jesus while he was still a baby.

The topping out ceremony is not the end

In a building there are often the electricians, the plumbers, the lifts, the decoration to finish, but it's a good place to enjoy the progress that has been made as the plan comes together.

Of course, God's the plan is not finished yet because not all people know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. That's why we pray, *thy kingdom come*.

But it's coming. As the Archbishop said in his New Year message in these dark times:

*"Every act of hope is there in every hand that's held, and every comforting word that's spoken. Up and down the country, it's there in every phone call. Every food parcel or thoughtful card. Every time we wear our masks, every smile of encouragement."*

The kingdom comes closer.

We are part of God's plan, putting the details in place after that topping out celebration. It's a very complicated plan so it takes a long time.

As the magi journeyed on, so we journey into this new year. Inheritors of that plan of God – He still wants everyone to know his love, forgiveness, and the great gift of salvation that Jesus won for us.

Thanks be to God.

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