



The Parish of Darfield
All Saints, Darfield and St Michael, Great Houghton

25th December **Bethlehem Edition**

A summary of two unusual years



From Luke: our Apostolic Correspondent

The whole Roman Empire in Travel Chaos:

The recent decree from Caesar Augustus caused travel chaos across the whole Roman Empire. Everyone had to return to their own town to be counted in a major Census.

I met up with Joseph and Mary, a couple on the road to Bethlehem. Despite Mary being with child they had to make the journey from their home in Nazareth to Bethlehem, a distance of around 100 miles. Joseph said "I can trace my ancestry back to King David so we are travelling to Bethlehem, the home City of King David."

My colleague Matthew was able to verify this claim and even managed to extend Joseph's family tree back to Abraham.

Details are in the first chapter of his Gospel Message

Tourist Accommodation in Bethlehem

Innkeepers in Bethlehem were reported as having their busiest time for many years. One Innkeeper who preferred to remain anonymous said he had had to turn many people away. One couple were in such desperate straits that he had offered them the use of his stable. The woman, identified only as Mary, had given birth to a baby boy and had to use a manger as a crib.

A Magnificent Sight – The Glory of God!

A group of shepherds from the area around Bethlehem arrived unexpectedly in the town. Their leader said that they were in the fields as usual with their sheep and saw a bright light and an Angel of the Lord.

They were scared stiff, but the Angel told them not to be afraid but to go to Bethlehem to find a new born baby who is a Saviour, Christ the Lord. Before they left the fields they saw a multitude of the Heavenly Host praising God and saying

"Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace among men with whom he is pleased!"

They managed to find the child as they had been told, wrapped in swaddling bands and lying in a manger.

They went back to their sheep rejoicing, praising God and telling everyone they met what they had seen and heard.

The Ultimate Sat Nav by Matthew

A few days ago, a group of Wise Men turned up in King Herod's Palace asking "where is he who has been born King of the Jews?"

Apparently, their observation of the night skies had revealed a bright star and their studies of the Hebrew Scriptures had revealed the promise of one who would reign as King and deal wisely with Israel.



After consulting his advisors, a worried King Herod had sent them towards Bethlehem. The star then led the Wise Men to the house in Bethlehem where Mary and the Child were. They left gifts and then returned to their own country.

We understand that gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh were received but Mary and her husband Joseph were unavailable for comment as they seem to have left in a hurry. Neighbours said they may have gone to Egypt.

The Forgotten Days of Christmas:

Only 364 shopping days to Christmas

We have been anticipating Christmas since Advent Sunday or in the shops since September. For some people, preparation for Christmas starts in the January Sales as they pick up half-price cards and gift wrap ready for next time.

What is the next Target in our Christian Life and in the life of our Church?

New Year's Day: with resolutions which rarely last beyond January 2nd!

Epiphany: The Revelation of our Christ to the Gentile world through the Wise Men.

Lent: a period of self-denial as we prepare for Holy Week and Easter

Good Friday: when all our sin was heaped on Christ at His Crucifixion

Easter: with the completion of God's saving plan in the Resurrection

Let us pause for a while and consider those days in our Church's Calendar immediately after Christmas which tend to be missed:

26th December: St Stephen:

Stephen (or rather his Feast Day) gets a fleeting mention in the carol, *Good King Wenceslas*.

Stephen, as recorded in Acts 6, was one of the seven Deacons chosen to oversee the daily welfare distribution enabling the Apostles to devote themselves to preaching the word. However he aroused the opposition of some of the Synagogue members. Brought before the High Priest and Sanhedrin on false evidence he made an impassioned speech covering God's involvement in the history of the Israelites and how Jesus fulfilled all the writings of the Prophets. Stephen was condemned and as the crowds gathered, he raised his head towards Heaven and said, "**I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.**" [Acts 7:56]. The enraged crowd took Stephen out of the city and stoned him to death. Stephen is thus the first recorded Christian Martyr.

27th November: St John the Evangelist:

St John is traditionally considered to be one of the original twelve disciples.

He is referred to as "the Disciple whom Jesus Loved" in the Gospel attributed to him. He was active in the early Church and is credited as the author of the Acts of the Apostles, three Epistles, and to have been given the vision of our future in Heaven recorded in the Book of Revelation. John, as one of the closest disciples to Jesus, was present at the Transfiguration [Luke 9: 28-36] and the first disciple to look in the empty tomb [John 20: 4-5]

"Surely I am coming soon, Amen. Come Lord Jesus" Revelation 22:20

28th December: Holy Innocents

King Herod received the Wise Men as they entered Jerusalem in their quest for the newly born King of the Jews. The Chief Priest and the Scribes identified Micah's Prophecy that Bethlehem was to be the source of "**A ruler who will govern my people**" [Micah 5:2]. Once the Wise Men had found Jesus, they were warned in a dream not to tell King Herod and returned to their own country by a different route.

Herod was so angry at the perceived threat to his position as King and that the Wise Men had not returned with any news, that he ordered the killing of all boys under two years old in Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Joseph had been warned of Herod's intentions by an Angel in a dream and had taken Mary and Jesus to safety in Egypt.

1st January: Circumcision of Christ

The Jewish practice of circumcision is first recorded in Genesis 17: 9-14 in which God established His Covenant with Abraham. Traditionally performed on the eighth day after the birth, the Brit milah ceremony includes the official naming of the child.

In the Gospel of Luke [2:21] we read that the circumcision was performed and the child of Mary was given the name **Jesus** in accordance with the instructions given to Mary by the Angel Gabriel:

"And behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus" Luke 1:31