ARCHBISHOPS JUSTIN WELBY, STEPHEN COTTRELL & GUESTS

FolowTheStar I E GREAT INVITATION 12 Days of Reflections for

12 Days of Reflections for Christmas & the New Year

> THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

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12 Days of Reflections for Christmas & the New Year

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Christmas Eve •AN INVITATION TO ... FOLLOW THE STAR



by Archbishop Stephen Cottrell

If there's one thing just about everyone knows about the Christmas story, it's that the Wise Men followed a star, and that the star signified the birth of a new king.

And because we know the story so well, we don't examine it much. We think we know what it means. But as we begin another Christmas, I think it's important to focus on one of the more neglected aspects of the story: the moment when the Wise Men stop following the star. They follow it for many miles to begin with, but when their destination gets near they choose to follow their own wisdom instead. They put their trust in their own charts and their own understanding. Instead of following the star, they visit King Herod.

After all, isn't a palace where a new-born king is most likely to be found?

Read Matthew 2.1-6

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage...' Calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, Herod inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet ...'

Reflection

Exactly how wise are these Wise Men? And whose wisdom do we follow? These are some of the questions this story raises.

Arriving at Herod's palace to see the new king and pay him homage, the Wise Men are not only in the wrong place, they're jeopardising the very thing they've come to honour. Herod, fearful for his own position, calls his scribes together. Consulting the ancient wisdom of the words of Scripture, they direct the Wise Men towards Bethlehem.

Following Jesus isn't easy. Other bright lights entice and fascinate. We can end up preferring our own ideas and trusting our own wisdom. We can finish up in the wrong place doing the wrong things. Only the light of Jesus – God's Living Word – endures. And it leads to unexpected places: to God found in stables, not palaces.

The invitation to all of us this Christmas Eve is to be re-directed towards the light that is Christ, and to allow ourselves to be surprised and delighted by where it leads us.

Jesus, Light of the World, be a light to our feet, and a lantern on our path, this Christmas Eve and always. Amen.

Boxing Day •AN INVITATION TO ... SHARE GOOD NEWS



🚩 by Naomi Metzger

When I was young I really had no idea I would become an athlete.

I didn't play many sports as a child. I had poor hand-eye coordination and I dreamed of pursuing other things. However, I gradually came to feel God wanted me to do sports for a bigger purpose.

But when training felt hard and competitions went badly, I started to question if this was my purpose and wondered what God wanted me to do with my talent.

Then a few months ago, I got a message from a supporter. He said that watching me compete and the small interactions we had really helped him when he was in a really dark period of his life. It then dawned on me that one of my purposes for being an athlete wasn't the medals or the titles – but spreading joy.

Read Luke 2.8-16

The angel said to the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid; for see—I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is the Messiah, the Lord ...' When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us.' So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger.

Reflection

The shepherds were the last people you'd expect to hear the good news directly from the angels. They were just ordinary folk doing their unglamorous work. When they became shepherds, they would have thought their main purpose was to look after sheep and that was all. However, once they had received this news, they became a staple part in the biggest story ever and they helped to spread the good news to everyone. Sometimes we can all feel ordinary or that we can't have much impact. But our seemingly small actions – such as checking up on a friend, helping a stranger in the shops or even just smiling at someone – can have a profound and lasting effect of spreading joy to the world around us. Today, like the shepherds, let's make haste to find simple, ordinary ways to share the extraordinary joy of Christmas with others.



Lord, thank you for all you have given us. Help us to share our gifts, our joy and our love with the world around us. Amen.

'We are all invited to #FollowTheStar and find out what it is pointing to: the person of Jesus and the light he brings to each of us.' ARCHBISHOP JUSTIN WELBY

> You are warmly invited to Follow the Star this Christmas in the company of

Ian Adams • Stephen Cottrell • Helen Dearnley Rose Hudson-Wilkin • Gemma Hunt • Victoria Johnson Naomi Metzger • Zeb Soanes • Anne Wafula Strike Justin Welby • Matt Woodcock • Ben Woodfield

This booklet offers 12 reflections on the theme of invitation, one for each day (Monday to Saturday) from Christmas Eve through to the Epiphany on 6 January.

Each reflection is by a different contributor and contains a picture, a short Bible passage, an invitation to action and a simple prayer. Together, they form a journey that will help you take fresh encouragement and hope from the Christmas story into the year ahead.

#FollowTheStar - The Great Invitation is the Church of England's Christmas theme for 2022.

You're very welcome at a church near you this Advent and Christmas. Find your nearest services and events and get involved via **AChurchNearYou.com**

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