

Time for something New.

Depending on context, the idea of something "New" might bring any manner of response...it all depends what exactly is new.

The safe arrival of a new baby is joyful.
The arrival of a new larger tax bill is not.

All of us will respond along broadly the same lines to certain new things. A new set of traffic lights on the A30 is not going to please anyone.

Yet we do have an instinctive response to that which is new. Some people love new ideas, new opportunities, new things; so having to upgrade their mobile phone is exciting, lots of new possibilities from your technology.

Others are more dubious when anything new is mooted. New doesn't necessarily mean good or better or easier. So you regret having to change your phone, having only just mastered the old one.

The writer of Ecclesiastes has written a profound truth that there is a time for everything and a season for every activity under the sun.

So then, there is a time for something new which inevitably invites us to let go of that which came before.

This is our first Sunday with three distinct worship services. It's not a new idea, but it is new to those of us worshipping at Holy Trinity in 2018.

Of course the new thing, whether it be these services or anything else, may not work or function or satisfy and so although there was a time to plant something new –

there may come the time to uproot it! It will be our collective experiences over six months that will inform whether or not this new idea takes root and is fruitful.

It is useful to be self-aware about our own instinctive response to something new. Recognising that we are less enthusiastic or indeed love something new almost regardless of what it is, can allow us to separate out our initial response and examine this new thing for what it really is.

Today is the celebration of Epiphany, the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles. The Gentiles in this case were the Magi from the East. They were most likely to be Medes who served as a sort of civil service to the Persian Empire. Certainly the Medes were astrologers and offered the Persians advice based on the movement of the stars and planets.

They were educated men who studied and researched. In all likelihood they were looking at myths and legends, prophecies and writing from the ancient Sumerians from the age before Moses. The observation of a new star and their learning led to the conclusion that a new King of the Jews was to be born in the west.

This discovery wasn't just academic satisfaction to them, they wanted to prove it. They wanted to see it through. This new thing prompted a response and they came searching.

Their journey was a journey of discovery, there was more they needed to know. Although they came to Herod's palace which alerted him to the ancient legend, here they learned something else new that sent them to Bethlehem.

I haven't time today to explore the business of the star stopping over the place where Jesus was, but if you come to the café on

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Wednesday morning here in church, I'll share with you the theories I've discovered.

What we know is that the Magi found fulfilment and were filled with overwhelming joy. The studying, searching, journeying led them to a new place of understanding and they travelled on by a different road.

It's a familiar story, and on this occasion leads me to two questions.

1. Are you studying, searching, and open to something new that can bring change?
2. Does God always have something new for us should we seek it?

Of course in the story, not everyone is excited about something new.

In Matthew 2v3 it says "when king Herod heard about this he was frightened".

He thought of himself as Herod the Great, but these exotic eastern magi are claiming someone has been born to be King of the Jews and a STAR was the sign. However great Herod was, he didn't have a star demonstrating his greatness. He was frightened.

He wasn't the only one. The scribes and chief priests who had in their hands the new knowledge that the Magi needed (that the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem)...did absolutely nothing about it.

Their own scriptures foretell of a Messiah to be born in Bethlehem and Magi from the east show up following a star with the knowledge of even more ancient prophecy and the Scribes and chief priests do nothing about it. They were frightened. They couldn't step out of line. Herod was too great and violent

and they already held too much power to want anything to change so they did nothing. I wonder if anyone remembered any of this 30 to 33 years later.

Doing nothing is an option. We can seek to live 2018 on an even keel, with no surprises thank you! We can hold onto what we have and enjoy what God has done before in our lives and leave it at that. Even with God's Word to us in our hands, we can chose to ignore it. But I'm not sure that is the way of overwhelming joy.

The alternative is to seek. The bible tells us that those who seek will find. Will seeking, finding and joy be your experience this year? Which brings me back to the questions.

In what way are you studying and searching, and as you do are you open to new discoveries? It may be in a small group that you do bible study, or a conversation group that meets. You may be formally studying on a course, or accessing something on-line. It might simply be that you read books that open up new ideas and challenge your thinking, if so – who do you share that with? In order to discover, you have to be looking and you have to be open.

Which brings question 2. Does God always have something new He wants to bring to us?

I think the answer is yes. And I also think that God brings to us new things that will reach deep into our lives to the very issues he would seek to address. Our spiritual journey is not a mere academic one of head knowledge, but a personal journey where head knowledge meets the longing of the heart. God, in his great wisdom takes us to the places of our greatest need.

That can seem a frightening prospect if it wasn't for the fact that over and over again the evidence seems to suggest that what waits for those who seek is overwhelming joy.

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There is much that is strange about the story of the Magi and this year the thing that struck me was what it must have been like to recognise that a teenage Mum and a small toddler in very ordinary humble circumstances were who they had been seeking and had travelled all that way to see.

It helps me remember that in my life it has been the unexpected and surprising that has had the most transformational impact and brought me the most joy. In other words God plays a hand in bringing new things into my life for the benefit and well being of my soul.

My responsibility is simply to be willing to seek, study and journey on in a spirit of openness convinced of God's goodness and without fear.