

Weeping and Worship - God holds ALL the pieces!

Prepared by Mervyn

May the mind of Christ, my Saviour,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.

May the peace of God my Father
Rule my life in everything,
That I may be calm to comfort
Sick and sorrowing.



May the love of Jesus fill me,
As the waters fill the sea;
Him exalting, self abasing,
This is victory.

May I run the race before me,
Strong and brave to face the foe,
Looking only unto Jesus
As I onward go.

May His beauty rest upon me
As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.

By Kate B Wilkinson 1859 - 1928

Father God, thank you for your faithful love that flows towards us all the time. We ask that we would experience your presence afresh today, and that the fear in our hearts would be driven out by your perfect love. Thank you that you hold us and understand every aspect of our lives, you care for us as a shepherd, may this knowledge comfort us and enable us to comfort others.

Help us to be confident that during these uncertain times you are at work. Help us to work with you to share the hope of knowing you with the people around us. We ask that you would bless and guide the government at this time and strengthen all those who work in the NHS. Jesus we acknowledge you as our ultimate healer and thank you that one day you will wipe all tears from our eyes. We pray in your name Lord Jesus, Amen

Jo gave me a 1000 piece jigsaw puzzle for Christmas that she purchased from a charity shop, so between Christmas and New Year I embarked on the challenge of completing the puzzle.

I was really surprised by all the different concepts that came to mind as I worked on the puzzle, I'd like to share some of these things now, so here we go!



Firstly, I was struck by internal voices of condemnation saying things like, “Are you really going to waste all this time doing this puzzle, surely there are better things you can do with your time!” This brought into focus the whole work / recreation balance that can lead to real stress in people's lives. God, in his great wisdom commands us to ring-fence time for rest. Kathryn has a plaque that says, “Time you enjoyed wasting is not wasted time,” so having dealt with the negative thoughts I was released to enjoy the puzzle!



Next, as I was faced with 1000 pieces on the table, I was struck by the concept that it is often much easier to start a job, than to finish it! This reminded me of the wonderful promise in **Philippians 1:6, that when God starts a good work in our lives he completes it!** Thankfully he doesn't give up on us.

As I said, Jo had bought the puzzle from a charity shop, so there was a question mark as to whether all the pieces would even be there. This raised the issue of doubt and uncertainty, of not knowing how the journey would end! This is how we often feel as we embark on a new year, and especially this year. As a follower of Jesus, I am blessed to know whatever the future holds, **God holds all the pieces!**



It was also one of those puzzles that doesn't have the final picture on the box, but only clues to get you going. Again this reminded me that as we go through life we don't see the whole picture, but God does.

Then there were the joy filled moments when you find two pieces that fit together, I could tangibly feel the positive endorphins! This led me to reflect on all the joy-filled times in life when things just work out and fall into place, almost as if there were someone behind the scenes with a plan!!

I also noticed that I could spend ages looking for one particular piece and not be able to find it, only to spot it immediately when I returned to the puzzle. How could I have missed it all that time? The Bible is a bit like a living jigsaw puzzle, you can read a passage several times, and then read the same passage on a different occasion to find that something new jumps out at you that you had never noticed before!

As we read the Bible and fit different parts together, we get a new and constantly fresh picture of Jesus. I know that each family in the church received a Gospel Gems calendar this Christmas, these calendars have a tiny part of the Bible for every day of the year. It may be helpful to treat each of these verses like a jigsaw piece, explore them from different angles, turn them around in your mind and try to fit them into your life. This activity will definitely enrich our lives!

I'm pleased to say I completed the jigsaw and all the pieces were there, reminding me that with God everything works out for good in the end!

Just to say, we do have five Gospel Gems Calendars left over, so please do get in touch if you would like to give one to someone.

Here are some words from a song by Lou Lewis that capture some of what I have been saying. She introduces the song like this.

“Christians have a great deal to say about believing in God, but has it ever occurred to you that God also believes in us? He values us highly and has a special and unique, personal plan for each of our lives.”



**I believe in you and the things you can do
I see the finished picture because I'm the master painter
And my hope never ends, I am your true and faithful friend
On this you can depend, I believe in you.**

**I believe in you and my love will always be true
For I know that that's essential If you're to reach your true potential.
You're a work of hidden art and I've already made a start
So open your heart, open your heart for I believe in you**

**But out there in the world where the visions always been blurred
Men put you down left you fallen on the ground
But I speak into the pain, look into my eyes, rise up again
Open you eyes, open your heart for I believe in you.**



**I believe in you and the things you will do
I see the finished vessel because I'm the master potter
And know that I always see the person that you will be
So open your eyes, open your heart for I believe in you.**

By Lou Lewis

Before we leave the Christmas season behind, I'd like to spend a little more time looking at the account of the Wise Men's visit to see Jesus. In our nativity plays and Christmas card designs we tend to take some poetic licence with the chronology of events, and often have the Wise Men visiting Mary, Joseph and Jesus in the stable along with the shepherds. However, from the Bible account this is clearly not the case. Matthew records that the Wise Men came to a house, and Mary, Joseph and Jesus fled to Egypt immediately after their visit. Had they fled to Egypt directly from the stable this would not allow time for Jesus to have been dedicated at the temple in Jerusalem. In reality Jesus was probably a toddler by the time the Wise Men rolled up!



Interestingly, Mary and Joseph don't seem in any hurry to get back to Nazareth after Joseph has registered, but set up home in Bethlehem. Why did they stay and set up home in Bethlehem? The Bible doesn't say, but from a privacy point of view Mary and Joseph may have been the source of much gossip in Nazareth, having been pregnant before she was married. They would have been anonymous in Bethlehem which I imagine would have been a much nicer experience for the couple.

Having thought about the visit of the Wise Men recently, it seems that in many ways this event is **a snap shot of the human experience**. Within this part of the Christmas Story we have...

- ♦ **Powerful people trying to hold on to power at all cost**
- ♦ **People who deliberately lie and plot to harm others**
- ♦ **People trying to find meaning and understanding in the universe**
- ♦ **People who are victims of circumstances outside of their control**
- ♦ **People who are overjoyed to find what they are looking for**
- ♦ **People having to flee their homeland**
- ♦ **People grieving because of the injustice in the world**
- ♦ **People revealing their instinct to worship**
- ♦ **And God, is right down in the middle of it all!**

Let's read about it in Matthew Ch 2

¹After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ²and 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."

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

⁶" '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.' "



⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He 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.”

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



¹³When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.”

¹⁴So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, ¹⁵where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.”

¹⁶When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. ¹⁷Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

¹⁸“A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.”

Let’s briefly look at each of these points that make up this ‘snap shot’ of humanity, with all its joys and sorrows, and see if any of them resonate in our personal situations.

Powerful people trying to hold on to power at all cost

Well, we don’t need to look very far to see this happening at the moment! I find it incredible that King Herod felt so threatened by a small child that he acted in such an awful way. It was clearly all about self preservation and ego.



The mention of a new king has seriously rattled him and all rational thought, or consideration of the people has been thrown out, as has been the case so often throughout history when a new contender for the throne appears. We see personified in Herod the deep sickness of sin in the human heart, that is present in each of our hearts to some degree.

How do I respond when I feel threatened? Would I crush another person to maintain the status quo, or for personal gain?

People who deliberately lie and plot to harm others

Herod pretends to want to worship Jesus, but his heart is full of envy and murder; again, a sad reflection of how far humanity has fallen. We see here the clear difference between the kingdom of truth and love, and the kingdom of hatred and lies.

People trying to find meaning and understanding in the universe

The Wise Men are aware there is more to be understood, and knowledge to be acquired. They have a sense that there is a bigger story at play that is not confined to just this world, but encompasses space, the stars and planets. Thank God for the people of science who pursue ongoing knowledge and understanding, for telescopes that reveal more of the wonders of the universe and especially at this time advances in medicine and vaccines.



People who are victims of circumstances outside of their control

Sadly, it seems that every generation of humanity has its victims. Millions of young lives lost during WW1 and 2, a generation of children in the Welsh village of Aberfan, the horrors of the genocide in Rwanda, Babies with HIV, and the list goes on. In this story, it is innocent baby boys snatched from their mother's arms. Where is God in all of this?

People who are overjoyed to find what they are looking for

On the other end of the scale we see that the wise men are overjoyed when they find Jesus. Their mission has been a success, their research has paid off and they are delighted to find the baby king. History is full of countless wonderful discoveries and achievements that have changed the world; electricity, antibiotics, music, travel, radio, internet... Where is God in all this?

People having to flee their homeland

And yet, in a world that has discovered so much, people are still having to flee their homeland. Like Mary and Joseph having to flee to Egypt with Jesus to save his life, desperate people across the world are risking their lives to try to find a safer place to live.



People grieving because of the injustice in the world

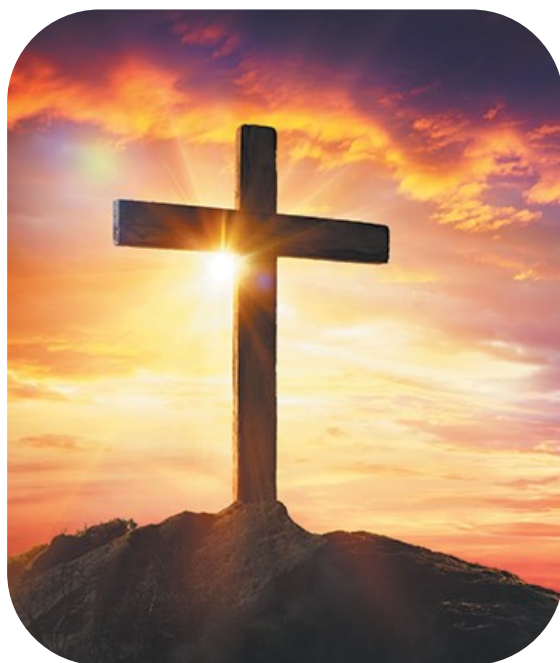
The horrific heartbreak in this story was known about by God, and foretold by the prophet Jeremiah hundreds of years earlier. He speaks of great mourning, and Rachel weeping for her children. Does the knowledge that God knew before hand bring comfort to the grieving process or make it worse? We are currently living through a pandemic where 1000's of people are grieving for lost ones who have died or are fearful for loved ones and themselves. Where is God in this?

People revealing their instinct to worship

At the heart of this story, grown men kneel down and worship a small child! We are by nature worshippers and all of us worship something. It may be a false god, money, or status; perhaps it may be a celebrity, sporting personality, or personal hero. Sometimes, people worship themselves and encourage the worship of others. In *Exodus 23:35* God commands us to worship him! I have been thinking about this verse recently, and meditating on it like a jigsaw piece - turning it around and looking at it from new perspectives! I used to imagine God sounding angry as he said it, but now I see it is a really loving command, because to worship anything less than God is to short change and devalue ourselves. Also, there is a sense of intimacy as he doesn't want anything to block my relationship with him.

And God, is right down in the middle of it all!

A few times as we have gone through this snap-shot of the human experience, I have asked where is God in all this, and the answer is ... right there in the middle of it all. And not just in the middle of it all, but doing something about it, redeeming it. The gifts that the wise men gave Jesus symbolised that he was a king that would sacrifice himself to bring restoration and forgiveness, and that justice would surely come. He would bring new life to the whole world whereby each and every life, no matter how short or prematurely cut off is significant and has the offer in Jesus, to be part of the massive renewal of heaven and earth.



Jesus was 100% human whilst never ceasing to be God. I love exploring the concept of when, as the child grew into the man, he also *knew* he was God? There are many clues in the Bible, but if, as you grew up you discovered, among many other things, that all your contemporaries were killed by an enemy in an attempt to kill you, what message would you take from that?

Each of those little boys who were so brutally taken are still present to God in an even greater sphere of reality where they are held at the very centre of God's love, while they with us, wait for the glorious return of Jesus when everything will be restored. God holds all the pieces and he holds your life too.



**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
the love of God, and the fellowship of
the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and
evermore. Amen**