



Dunedin Methodist Parish

Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone

www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz

Find us on Facebook: **Dunedin Methodist Parish**

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PARISH BULLETIN

27th January 2019

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY 3rd February

9.30 am	Mornington	R Mitchell
10.00 am	Mosgiel	R Masterton
11.00 am	Glenaven	D Poultney
11.00 am	St Kilda	M Hardy

Dates to remember:

5 Feb	1.30 pm	Mosgiel MWF – Hall lounge
22-24 Feb		Otago Southland Synod – Camp Columba

MOSGIEL METHODIST WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP Tuesday 5th February @ 1:30pm in our hall lounge where we will launch our SPECIAL PROJECT.

OTAGO SOUTHLAND SYNOD 22-24 February 2019 at Camp Columba (Pukerau, just before Gore). Everyone welcome - there will be some Church business as well as educational/thought-provoking sessions. We start late Friday afternoon and finish with an early lunch on Sunday. \$50 per person for the whole weekend (as it's subsidised by Synod). Dorm sharing - bring your own bedding - or you can stay in Gore (at your own cost). We'd prefer people to come for the whole time but day visitors are welcome at \$20 per person.

Please let Rachael know by 10 Feb if you are wanting to come (email to rmasterton@actrix.co.nz or phone 4764867). Car pooling will be organised.

STORY FROM THE MISSION



Otago Corrections Facility: Skills for

Dads: The current Skills for Dads class at OCF is at capacity. We have ten in the class and while some had been fulltime dads, a couple had very little practical experience with their children. Conversations were lively and sometimes off-topic but we always managed to get back to the point! The men enjoyed the programme and commented on the things they had learned. One said he really appreciated the refresher on what it really meant to be a dad; another that he had particularly appreciated the sharing of experiences around the group; another that he had learned a lot, especially that time was the most important thing to spend when it comes to your kids, not money.

If you would like to support the Mission's work with a donation, please visit www.givealittle.co.nz and search for The Methodist Mission.



BEGINNINGS

As Glenaven begins its year, we think of beginnings, like the birth of a child - but especially, since Christmas is so recent, the birth of THE child who was the founder and subject of our religion. It is Jesus, and what we know of

him, that brings us to a gathering in a particular building on a particular day, and who is (again) the reason for the season.

That season is Epiphany, from a Greek word meaning 'appear, reveal, shine, give light', as some of us learned at St Mary's, Mornington, last week, when the Anglicans and Methodists so close to each other on Whitby St, combined. The emphasis in Epiphany is on the mysterious magi from the unspecified East, who travelled to Bethlehem, guided by a potent sign in the form of a moving star, so they could pay homage to a particular baby newly born. So goes the story.

We have to use the word **magi** because there is no one word in English for its many meanings. Again, it's a Greek word (because Greek was the common-denominator language around the Mediterranean when the Bible, both testaments, was being written down and spread as far as it would go). We know the meaning as 'wise men' but they could equally be called astrologers, or members of a priestly caste of ancient Persia (Iran), or wizards, chaps who have secret magical powers.

Yes, they are portrayed as being as foreign as they can possibly be, because the writers are using them to represent the non-Jewish peoples of the world, the Gentiles. They appear in only one of the gospels, the book of Matthew, because the writers of Matthew had a particular audience they were trying to reach, of Jews who might become Jewish Christians, rather than Christian Jews. Note the magi don't appear in the same story as the shepherds and angels (that's Luke), or in Mark (which begins with a quotation from Isaiah introducing the figure of John the Baptizer, who prepares the way for Jesus). They are certainly nowhere near the gospel of John, which was written down last of the four gospels and has quite a different character.

There is not, indeed, any one gospel that presents what we know as 'the Christmas story'. They present bits of it, differently imagined each time. And **imagined** is the right word for these stories. Jesus, we know, was

born into history, in the time of Caesar Augustus, and was crucified by the order of Pontius Pilate, a Roman prefect. We know for a fact only that he was born and died, and approximately when.

There was no such thing as factual history in the era of the scriptures, no sense of objective truth - that came later with the rise of science. All there was, was **story**. There wasn't even certainty about authorship, because it was the usual thing to ascribe your writings to a famous person if you weren't famous yourself, or if you were just writing down a group of tales that had hitherto been spread by word of mouth, possibly over a very long time.

So I'm afraid to say it's all fiction. I hope that's not a disappointment to you. As a writer of fiction, it is very exciting to me! The baby laid in a feeding stall in a stable, the shepherds, the angels, the star overhead and the ones who got on their camels and followed it from afar -- particularly the last-mentioned -- are all inventions, and mostly particular to one strand of a many-stranded tradition. The magi, understood as kings, later even given the names Caspar, Melchior and Balthazaar, are the most fictional of all.

The stories clustered around Jesus well after he died, to illustrate that he was indeed like a new king for Israel. The wise men paying homage to him indicate he was also wise.

Jesus born into history was only significant for the number of amazing stories that gathered about him. Our religion is based on these imaginative stories, and all the centuries of amazing stories handed down in the Hebrew scriptures about his forbears in 'David's line.' Hymns offer more stories, and sermons still more. There is much to celebrate, especially the foundational creation stories, all so different. We value creativity, finally, not only because it earns money (for some) or improves people's lives, which it does, but because we believe it is of God.

-- HWW