

Matthew 2 1-12

God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect. Through poverty, god shows abundance, through weakness god shows his strength, through oppression god brings liberation, equips us with white robes instead of armour, palm trees instead of swords and in dying god gives us life. God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect.

I've got a real testimony about this about how God used me in such a way that is opposite to what I expected. Growing up I had a major problem with being bullied and at the age of 17, I was failing academically and I decided that school wasn't for me. I always laughed when people said "going to school are the best years of your life!".

9 years later, I felt God call me towards ordination, I had to start a process that evaluated me on different criteria. They deemed my vocation to be strong, they thought I had a good experience with Church of England Ministry, they even thought I had a strong quality of mind! Somehow... However, the biggest gap in my wannabe vicar CV was an educational reference. So, they chucked me on a course that would basically have me doing 4 A-Levels in a year. A challenge that made no rational sense to me.

I'd been told my whole life that I would not do well in an educational environment however, God took me, the college dropout, the bully victim. And with his help, I earned the respect of my peers by becoming the class president, I even somehow got straight A's. God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect. He does not only redeem, but he restores to fullness also.

Our reading, The Story of the Magi in Matthew 12 really does show the kingdom of God in ways opposite to which we expect.

For example, The Story of the Magi really does mirror the crucifixion. Instead of the traditional gifts, Pontius Pilate will have rather different gifts to give him later in life! A cross for a throne and instead of a golden crown, thorns. The Magi were warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, to avoid harm to Jesus. Pilate was warned via his wife's dream not to harm Jesus. Pilate's soldiers became the first Gentiles to call Jesus the king of the Jews, since the Magi, however one is said in worship, the other in mockery. The Magi see a bright

star, but at the time of the crucifixion, we read about this, unearthly darkness that spread across the land.

But, God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect.

The people of Israel were probably not expecting a baby to come save them. It's more likely that Israel Expected a militant, victorious king!

The reason I believe that Israel expected a military leader goes right back to the story of Hanukkah, which we know today as a Jewish celebration of light—The story, sees a foreign king, march right into the holy temple, defile the alter by sacrificing a pig on it, and puts up a statue of a false God. It was tradition in those days that priest could not enter the temple without a rope tied around their ankle, just in case they had to be dragged out because they died if they had sin in their hearts when they were in there, and that is too much to bear before God. You can imagine the Israelites thinking, ha! We've got him now! God's going to strike him down for marching into the temple and committing such terrible sin! Any minute now... Anyyy minuuttteeeee now.... But God did not strike him down.

Then against this foreign king, a group of people rise up called the Maccabees, and they are filled with zeal for God's law. Using guerrilla warfare tactics, they manage to defeat this foreign king, and they re-establish the temple. Upon their victory, they arrived back in Jerusalem to great rejoicing, and as a sign of their victory, they welcomed these great military leaders by waving palm branches in the air, and shouting hosanna in the highest. Sound familiar? It's very similar to the Palm Sunday story when Jesus came back on a donkey, they waved palm branches, shouted hosanna in the highest.

Just to give you that context, the story of Hanukkah shows that the Jews were expecting a military leader! They were expecting a man who could overthrow the roman oppression they were under.

Consider king Herod at this time. A foreign king, in Jerusalem. A city where EVERY YEAR they celebrate Hanukkah, that time when a foreign king was overthrown by guerrilla warfare. I'd be a little bit paranoid too. I'd be even more worried by these whispers, that the king of the Jews had been born, then some Magi from the East show up asking where the king is! But the point is

that that is the type of saviour the Jews were waiting for was not this victorious champion who would overthrow Rome. What they got was a baby.

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The Magi were probably expecting a great king too! That's why they popped around Herod's house first! That's why they brought Gold, Frankincense and myrrh, they were traditional gifts to present to a king, or even a God! But when they got there expecting wealth and abundance, they find poverty. And it took this baby to show them what true wealth was. For they understood that right at the beginning this child had to die for the sins of the world. To give eternal riches. That's what the myrrh was for, an ointment for his body when the time came.

Fast-forward 30 years again to Palm Sunday, The Israelites waving their branches were expecting this warrior. But fast forward a week from that, look at him, he's hanging there unable to move. Nailed to a tree. In weakness God showed his true strength when he was crucified. God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect.

After that, I guess many were expecting Jesus to be just another dead guy. One of the many political foes that Rome had left in its wake. A visit to the tomb to pour ointment on a dead body, sees a rolled away stone, and some familiar sounding gardener. When Jesus reveals himself to Mary. God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect.

I wonder in what ways God is calling us to be the opposite of the norm? For me God called me away from the opposite of my own human sense, I didn't want to go back to school, but he showed me that he was bigger than any bullies or past hurts that I've ever had.

You can forgive that person who has hurt you, even though that is the opposite of what your own human sense is saying. But Jesus goes even further than that! Talk about God showing us his glory through the opposite of what we expect, he doesn't just ask us to forgive our enemies, he asks us to love them too.

Imagine what the kingdom of God would look like if we gave a person who has hurt us a phone call saying we've forgiven them. Imagine if we invited them around for dinner too?

Jesus made friends with prostitutes, tax collectors, known criminals. Imagine what would happen if we allowed people into our social circles who are the opposite to what we would normally allow. I imagine our Church would look a lot different.

Are you denying yourself a mission opportunity just because your financial security could be jeopardised?

Have you ever told yourself you are too old or too young to take that bold new step? Perhaps God is asking you to put faith in him instead of your own ability.

Perhaps you're thinking, Mikey, that's all good for you, you're training to be a vicar, and this stuff is for people like you and other church leaders. But God brings us into a priesthood of all believers.

So, let's allow ourselves to be challenged. Allow ourselves to be changed. Submit ourselves to God's will and accept that God shows us his glory through the opposite of what we expect. But to do that we have to trust him, and act. Amen.