

Connecting faith and daily life

# Staying vigilant

Heather Smith *reflects on*  
Matthew 2:1-12

There is a common scam in India where tourists are asked to use their tax exemption to help someone avoid tax on exporting precious stones. The tourist ends up being accused of stealing them and is advised by the scammer to hand over the value of the stones to avoid prosecution.

In a foreign country, unaware of local customs, it is easy to be duped by unscrupulous people. In unfamiliar territory the Magi came close to falling for Herod's scam. It may not have hurt them, but it would certainly have hurt the baby they had come to worship. What saved the situation was the Magi's close attention to what God had to say. Having been alert to the leading of the star, they were also alert to God's warning not to return to Herod.



Most of us don't have dreams in which God tells us what to do, but by building up a close relationship with God we become better at knowing the right direction to travel and which choices to make. It may be easy to spot the Indian scam, because it relies on our greed and is obviously too good

to be true. But sometimes we are all in a foreign country when it comes to knowing what is right.

If we stay close to God we will find it easier to make the right decisions. ☺

**Lord, draw us closer to you. Help us to recognise when we have a choice to make and to hear your guidance. Be as close to us as our own breath, gently directing us in the ways of righteousness. Amen.**

## The indigenous people of Australia

by Max Serjeant

The colonial era saw European culture spread to every corner of the globe, and with it Christianity. The peoples the colonists encountered had their own very different belief systems, yet Christianity was taken up enthusiastically by many.

The encounter was difficult for indigenous Australians, yet today seventy-three per cent identify as Christian.

Aboriginal spiritual beliefs are based around the dreamtime – a period when the world was unformed and powerful animal-

human hybrids walked the earth, creating the natural features which exist today. These journeys were recorded in songs and stories, which are fiercely guarded and given out only as an individual goes through initiation ceremonies. It is hard to imagine a more different set of beliefs to those of Christianity, but many Aboriginal people have no problem combining the two. They separate out the religious aspects of their traditional belief system, while still retaining a sense of cultural pride. Today there are Christian Aboriginal ministers, priests and bishops of every denomination.

*Max Serjeant is a writer and anthropologist, based in Western Australia, working in the field of Aboriginal land rights. In this four-part series he offers an insight into Aboriginal culture and Christianity.* ☺

## Animals of the Bible

The sparrow

by Caroline Fletcher

In biblical times many people struggled for food. The sparrow, being very common, was caught and sold in markets as a source of cheap meat for poor people. In Matthew's Gospel Jesus says that two sparrows could be purchased for a penny. Luke's version goes further, saying that five cost only two pennies, so a

fifth sparrow was thrown in for free.

Jesus uses this to make a deeply moving point. Even though sparrows were worth so little, not one of them fell to the ground without God knowing. If God tenderly watches over the humble sparrow, how much more are we cared for?

Today, in many places, sparrow numbers have dropped steeply. We have been guilty of undervaluing this little brown bird. The sparrow reminds us that God not only cares for us but for all creation, no matter how small and unspectacular. ☺

“We fail in the work of grace and love when there is too much of us and not enough of God.”

Suzanne Woods Fisher, *The Search*

## Church of Scotland: Orphir and Stenness Parish

**Interim Moderator:** Rev June Freeth 721449

**Locum Minister** Rev Martin Prentice    **Session Clerk:** Nicol 811242

There is a loop system. Adjust hearing aids to benefit.

**A warm invitation is extended to everyone to meet in the hall at the back of the church, after the service, for a cup of tea.**

### Intimations

**Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> Jan – 7pm – Fellowship in the kirk hall**

**8pm – Choir**

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> Jan – 7pm - Yarnin' in the kirk hall**

**Thursday 9<sup>nd</sup> Jan – 10am – 12noon Community Café in the kirk hall**

**10am -12noon The Post Office will be open in the vestry –**

**\*Please note the new time for the Post Office**

**27th January - 1st February 2020** Blue Door: Volunteers are required to assist in the shop and to provide home bakes. Please add your name to the list on the wall beside the tea rota. Speak to Carol if you wish more information.

**Reading** John 1 v 1-18

### **Hymns**

- CH4 113 – “God the Father of Creation”
- CH4 237 – “Look forward in faith”
- CH4 317 – “Before the world began”
- CH4 320 – “Joy to the world, the Lord is come
- CH4 543 – “Longing for light, we wait in darkness

### Opening responses:

Leader: As another year ends

All: We gather to give thanks.

Leader: As another year begins

All: We gather to think of all that has been and what is yet to be.

Leader: As we reflect on all You have done and still do for us

All: We gather to offer our grateful praise.

### Closing responses

Leader: We move to a New Year,

All: A new Year with God.

Leader: We journey as a family,

All: A new Year with God.

Leader: We look forward in hope,

All: A new Year with God.

Leader: We work for the kingdom

All: A new Year with God.

### Doxology CH4 786

May the God of peace go with us as we travel from this place

May the love of Jesus keep us firm in hope and full of grace.