

Home group – Resource Material

All Welcome – Matthew 2: 1 - 12

The promise of 'God for all' was a recurring theme throughout the Old Testament. And yet when it came to it, the reality of a vast, diverse family was not only shocking, it was deeply challenging for the Early Church.

As Christians, our story tells us that God is all about 'reaching out' and 'drawing in' and yet today we continue to wrestle with issues of welcome and inclusion. This material is designed to help us reflect on the biblical precedent of 'welcome and inclusion' and what that looks like for us in our context today... There are lots of questions for you to choose from (don't feel you have to tackle everything!)

Icebreaker questions

Can you remember the last time you found yourself in an environment where you felt either unwelcome or uncomfortable?

When was the last time you were 'new' or felt like an outsider?

What does it feel like to be an outsider?

What does it feel like to *belong*? How important is 'belonging' for human health and well-being?

Who are the 'outsiders' in our society/community?

Worship

Before saying the words of The Lord's Prayer together, invite the group to reflect upon both the insider/outsider function of the prayer – it binds believers together but compels us to be outward looking in its kingdom focus.

Word

Read Matthew 2: 1-12 a couple of times (ask for two different readers) and invite the group to listen carefully for things which strike them or raise questions. Invite the group to respond to the readings with their impression of the story or any share questions the reading may have raised.

Mary and Joseph meeting the Magi was a clash of cultures – two very different worlds colliding – in fact you couldn't imagine a more unlikely encounter!

Have you ever considered what this encounter was like and it's significance for Jesus' story and for human history?

The encounter between Mary and Joseph and the Magi was intended to demonstrate that through Jesus, God was activating his plan to expand his family and include everyone!

To what extent is 'including everyone' easier said than done? Is 'all welcome' an achievable goal? What are the obstacles to welcome and inclusion? What does 'inclusion' even mean?

The New Testament documents the tensions the Early Church wrestled with as they sought to become a diverse community made up of Jewish believers and gentile believers. In other words, inclusion and unity weren't easy!

What are the issues we wrestle with today in terms of being a diverse community? How can we live side by side with people who are different to us? Is it inevitable that we will always gravitate towards people 'like us'? How can we learn to celebrate difference?

A Christian understanding of 'welcome and inclusion' is about 'creating more space in our hearts and our homes for others in our lives'. This means embracing change and recognising that inclusion is costly.

When was the last time you had to change your life to accommodate someone else?

Are there any changes that our church community could make to be more inclusive?

What now?

Pray:

Loving God,

Thank you that even though we are limited in our capacity to celebrate diversity and include others, your vision, your love and you Spirit compel us to keep trying.

At the start of this year and the start of this sermon series, help us to have open hearts and engaged minds.

Give us vision, compassion, discernment, energy, good humour, courage and grace to become ever more welcoming, hospitable and inclusive.

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

Act: Explore ways in which you could become 'outsiders in other people's worlds, in order to draw them in to God's' - instead of waiting for people to join our culture! This is the heart of 'mission' and the idea of 'incarnation' (Jesus stepping in to *our* world to draw us to God).

Act: Remind yourself what it's like to be an 'outsider' – go somewhere new, visit a different church tradition, or worship with a different congregation (at St Mark's). Observe how you feel and how people react to you. Seek to use your experiences of being an 'outsider' to inform your 'welcome' at St Mark's.

Act: Support people and projects directly involved with helping society's 'outsiders' (particularly the homeless and refugees) – think creatively about how you can play your part in 'reaching out' and 'drawing in'.