



Matthew 2:1-12

Top Gear. Those of you who come to the evening service know that I watch the programme when I get home from church on a Sunday evening. I can remember when colour telly first started in 1967. I was 10 years old and I can remember going with my Dad to have a look at a demonstration of colour TV at the local TV store. A crowd of 20-30 people gathered around and we watched Top Gear where Raymond Baxter demonstrated the latest car of the day although I can't remember which one.

Times have changed. It's now run by the "three wise men" - NOT - Jeremy Clarkson, Richard Hammond and James May. What they are famed for are their challenges. Here are some of them **MOTORCYCLING THROUGH VIETNAM, CROSSING THE CHANNEL IN A DIY AMPHIBIOUS CAR, CROSSING THE BOTSWANA DESERT IN THREE ORDINARY ROAD CARS CARS THAT COST LESS THAN £1000.** Do you know what is Top Gear's favourite second-hand vehicle. It's the **TOYOTA HILUX.** There is a story that suggests these cars are virtually indestructible. So they crashed it a couple of times, drove it down a flight of steps and then let it be washed away by the tide for 48 hours. When they found it again and drained the water off, the pick-up started again without needing any special tools. They then **SET FIRE TO IT** - and it still started! The final indignity was placing it on top of a block of flats that were due to be demolished. After the demolition, they dug out the pick-up - and yes, it started. It's now a permanent exhibit on their show. Toyota were so pleased with the free advertising from Top Gear that the team were invited to go on a challenge to reach the North Magnetic Pole by driving over the sea ice in Toyota Hilux pick-ups - the first time it had ever been done.

In fact the north Pole trip was the most sensible of any of the challenges Top Gear have done. Most are stupid and dangerous and seem a daft thing to do. That said their crossing of the Botswana desert was the first known, let alone by unmodified road cars.

The cartoon this morning was a take-off of Top Gear as you might have guessed - even some of the jokes were nicked from the show. But I think the wise men would have made good guests on Top Gear. The Bethlehem Challenge had all the ingredients of a Top Gear challenge - it seemed Daft, Dangerous and Demanding.

DAFT

In many ways the Bethlehem Challenge of the wise men seemed silly - looking for a new-born king without knowing who he was or where he was born. Even though they were Wise Men, they had to stop by Jerusalem and ask for directions! Then after that they followed the star. Not exactly the way things were done even in the first century.

And then of course when they eventually found Jesus, they didn't find a prince in a palace but an ordinary baby from an ordinary family in an ordinary house. Hmm - strange! Or perhaps not. Those of us who know Jesus also know that we often encounter God in the strangest of places because He's not limited by our imaginations!

WAS DANGEROUS

The Bethlehem Challenge was a bit like a Top Gear Challenge. The Top Gear lads do some risky things. Richard Hammond was nearly killed whilst riding in a jet car three years ago when it crashed at 314 mph - the BBC won't let them do that sort of thing any more as it is too expensive on the insurance!

Yes, it was a dangerous trip for the Wise Men. They had to navigate through lands where they could have been robbed of their expensive gifts and then speak to Herod - who was a nasty piece of stuff -

he went on to try to hunt Jesus down in order to kill him, so Mary & Joseph had to flee to Egypt. The Wise Men having been warned by an angel that Herod wanted Jesus dead, risked his wrath by sneaking home on an alternative route.

WAS DEMANDING

The journey itself would have been demanding on the Wise men as they would have travelled for many days on rough roads until they found the new King that they had come to worship and bring gifts to.

But this is where the Bethlehem Challenge and Top Gear part company. Top Gear isn't noted for spending too much on their challenges usually. It's a case of giving the team a few hundred pounds each to buy some wreck of a second-hand car to modify and then murder for the purposes of entertaining the 350 million Top Gear viewers worldwide. The Wise Men brought expensive gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh and they worshipped Jesus because they recognised who He was – someone who would live and die for them.

Top Gear has many fans but unlike Jesus has no-one who will follow. Richard Hammond is not demanding a lifetime's commitment from you. James May has never laid his life down for you. Jeremy Clarkson is not expecting you to worship him – even though it might seem so sometimes!

Jesus is no longer a baby or even a grown man who gives you an hour's entertainment once a week and has Christmas Specials (like this one!). The Wise Men realised He is King. He is the Son of God, the creator of this world. He is the only man who had claimed that his death would be a means that people like us could find a way back to God. He is the only man who has come back to life never to die again and transforms people even today from being cowardly to courageous as they seek to follow Him in their own version of the Bethlehem Challenge (it's called life!)

And right down the ages, people have discovered that Jesus, the one who was a baby but is now risen and alive is someone who is part of their life. How do they do that. By recognising that Jesus died to open a way by which God is able to forgive us for those things (our sins) which keep us apart from God and enter into a lifetime and eternal relationship with God.

Following Jesus is probably the most exciting thing anybody can do. Life with Jesus is to me the ultimate adventure.

WISE MEN STILL SEEK HIM

HOW ABOUT YOU?

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