

**2021-01-03 ... 10am Epiphany All Age Talk ... Revd Canon Judy Hunt
Matthew 2: 1-12**

Prayer

Today – I'm going to split the talk before and after the Gospel Reading:

Give out, randomly, four cards labelled respectively:

Hope, Lost, Tough and Nasty.

Ask if anyone knows, or can suggest, what the four words have in common?

The 'real' answer is that they are all genuine – if rather odd – place names in the UK.

- Hope is a village in Derbyshire and another near Wrexham
- Lost is a hamlet in Aberdeenshire;
- Tough – pronounced 'Tuck' – is also in Aberdeenshire;
- Nasty is a village in Hertfordshire.

That aside, they could be words to describe how we feel about the year just passed. And we all have experienced times in our lives when one of those words could be applied.

They are also all related to the Bible story we're about to hear

See if you can identify them as you listen to the reading now:

Matthew 2 verses 1-12

Go through:

- Lost – quite clearly when the Wise Men went to Herod's Palace
- Tough – a few times: the length of journey, getting things wrong
- Nasty – well, we know that Herod was a nasty character
- Hope – came at the beginning (the star), in the middle – their arrival and their gifts must have given hope to Joseph and Mary - and at the end when they listened to God and went home another way

And there's another thing to notice about the experiences these words describe. Even more importantly – if somewhat unexpectedly – God was present in all those circumstances in our Bible passage – and can be found in all our circumstances. All of the circumstances of going through a tough time, feeling lost, being given hope, encountering people who are nasty – and more.

2021 is, as yet, a largely 'unknown country' not least after the horrors and challenges of 2020! But as we experienced last year – we can turn to God for strength and help every day.

Here's a story to finish: This is a true story:

PTO

“A woman was returning from a hospital visit. She had just been informed that her husband had about two weeks to live – his kidneys were failing, and no treatment seemed possible. In great distress, she started her journey home. She became aware of a sign, gleaming in the dark: ‘Take Courage’. Somehow, she felt this was a message from God.

After she got home, she shared her story with her church, and the whole church prayed for the couple. Some days later, the consultant told her that her husband was well enough to receive home dialysis after all. A few weeks later, he was well enough for the couple to join the church’s pantomime outing. Indeed, they had many more years of life together. The thing is, both the woman and her husband were avid teetotallers – totally opposed to pubs and pub culture. But the ‘take courage’ sign that spoke to the woman – it was that of a pub!”

Taken from: [Explore and respond \(rootsontheweb.com\)](http://rootsontheweb.com)

Looking for and finding God in unexpected places, or in unlikely people, is a theme we can adopt for 2021.