

## Epiphany Sermon 2023

**Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:2-3,5-6. Matthew 2:1-12.**

### *a light journey.*

Those of you present at our wonderful Nativity and Christingle Christmas eve would have seen that Herod and the 11 wise men with their gifts somewhat stole the show – not just because of Herod's size 15 feet but because they usually get the best costumes and some dramatic music. It would be churlish to insist on separating the visitation of the Wise Men, the Kings, the Magi with their gifts of Gold Frankincense and Myrrh from nativity plays on the basis they weren't at the birth of Jesus. Our stable is now rightly converted into a House and we are rightly celebrating this feast separately. The Feast of Epiphany 6<sup>th</sup> January although it may be celebrated on the Sunday between January 2 and January 8. The feast commemorates when Jesus Christ was first revealed as the Messiah not just to the Hebrews but the whole world. The Gospel of Matthew, that most Jewish Gospel is the only one that recounts that three wise men from the East visited our savior after his birth and acknowledged him with gifts representing kingship, priesthood, and death. Three gifts that tell us who he is and how his messiahship is to be manifest.

Matthew sees in this deep resonance to his own Jewish tradition, even though these characters were not Jews. In our old testament reading we hear the prophecy of Isaiah “Jerusalem, arise! Your light and the Lord's glory shine upon you, attracting nations and kings.” He would have seen resonance too with the story of Daniel with his wise companions and his witness to God in the face of death to the gentiles of his day. We all know that St. Paul, was even more steeped in Judaism than Matthew, more zealous more pharisaical - yet he becomes the apostle to the gentiles. He writes for us today that “God's grace entrusted to me reveals a mystery: Gentiles are fellow heirs with Jews, part of one body, sharing the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

Today's gospel is packed and dense with meaning and wonder and we can often skip over by virtue of its familiarity. The packed density could speak to us about what gifts we could bring to the service of the Lord. We might miss that these wealthy gifts from wealthy men allow the Holy Family to flee and survive in Egypt before their return after Herod's death. There is symbolic and practical importance to gift-giving and sacrifice: The gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh brought by the Magi to Jesus symbolize the act of giving to God our best, acknowledging His sovereignty, priesthood, and the foreshadowing of His death.

The universality and international aspect of the magi could speak to us on a global level about our common humanity and ever contemporary issues of racism and immigration. In the beginning God says let there be light later humanity is made in His image. Here in this story we have the effect divine light and universal attraction. It is an outward story that lifts us from inward gaze – it emphasises the shining of God's light upon Jerusalem, for a bigger purpose – for the revelation of God to the world, attracting nations and kings, and signifying the return and unification of God's people.

This is a gospel story recalled and written in the heart of a new covenant people and speaks of unity and inclusivity in Christ: the mystery that Jews and Gentiles are co-heirs, united in one body and sharing in the promise of Jesus Christ through the gospel, emphasizing the universal nature of God's salvation.

There is a spiritual well in this gospel to draw upon.. Firstly this concerns guidance, revelation, and obedience. The journey of the Magi, guided by a star to find Jesus, represents divine guidance and revelation. The Magi's obedience in following the star and their decision to return by another route, avoiding Herod, signifies the wise response of faith to God's personal revelation.

The story's spiritual well is filled too with the themes of journey and faithful search as marks of the divine life. The Magi's journey to find Jesus symbolizes the spiritual journey of seeking truth and the need for persistent faith and commitment in the search for divine revelation. But the journey and purpose is not finished for them with the arrival at the Holy house. They are changed and their purpose is not yet complete. It is a theme so wonderfully explored in TS Eliot's famous poem journey of the Magi

Here is divine Intervention and protection – they are part of God's plan which is not finished when they meet the Lord. The guidance of the Magi by a star and their divine warning in a dream highlights God's active role in guiding and protecting those who seek Him.

What will resonate for us today amongst so much as we celebrate this feast? Perhaps we could at least recognise our faith as a journey unique but one that must be shared where the whole purpose is not yet revealed. Perhaps we could reflect that the inner light of faith is not an inward light for the true spiritual journey progresses from self-love to universal love. Christ's love is for all and in this story we might see that inherent dignity and goodness are God-given, not earned. Above all the Epiphany symbols is the star. As with all stars we can choose not to look but it will still shine on all and in this star is a universal understanding of God, transcending specific religions or groups. True faith and religion is not an exclusive club but an advocate for a universal message of love, as demonstrated in all of our readings.

Our personal lives and that of our world may at times seem cloudy and dark but this light shines ever bright even when we don't look or see. As St. John puts it this light will never be overcome by the darkness. Christ is our light but not only ours. By God's grace may we reflect that light as we progress on our journeys of faith, for our sakes and for all humanity.

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