

## Sermon for 31.12.17 Epiphany

Today we celebrate the festival of the epiphany of our Lord Jesus to the Gentiles by the Magi. An Epiphany is a moment of sudden and great revelation or realization and in this great compact story in Matthew's gospel, we hear the greatest revelation of all - the universal nature of the call into salvation through Jesus Christ, that was prophesied in the Old testament.

As we may know the Magi were a cast of wise men, who were understood to be officials associated with interpretation of dreams, astrology and magic who came from beyond the bounds of the Roman Empire. In these ancient times, just as we do in today's world, foreign regimes often send emissaries to greet and give gifts to new rulers or kings. These Magi, however, were not **sent** from the east, but were instead **led** by a star they had witnessed at its rising and which had signalled the birth of a new age, the birth of the king of the Jews.

They travelled over many lands and came to Jerusalem the capital of Judea and sought the king to pay him homage. In Jerusalem they asked King Herod, "where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? "

A simple question, we might think, yet one that sets a frenzy of fear into action – for Matthew's gospel proclaims, "When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him." Herod wastes no time and initiates the search to discover the answer.

He calls all the chief priests and scribes of the people together to find it. In Bethlehem they tell him, for so it has been written by the prophet Micah. Bethlehem is the place from where a ruler who is the true shepherd will come.

So Herod sends the Magi on their way to Bethlehem, telling them to make sure they let him know where the child may be found so that he too can go and pay him homage. An unlikely request from a king who knows only self-homage -and as the narrative goes, an angel, warns the Magi in a dream and redirects their route home – it is not through Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, the Magi set out and the star continues to lead them to where the child lay. They found the child with his mother Mary, bowed down in homage - and gave him their offerings. And how significant those were, in the light of the fulfilment theme interwoven in this gospel.

Gold is the gift fit for a king and the king in baby clothes was there. Frankincense was in the constant use by the priests in the temple, and the ultimate priest, the one who was to manifest, and by his life teach the love of God to human kind, lay before them. Myrrh was used to embalm the dead. The man born to be king was the man born to die. In those three gifts, we see who Jesus is, what he came to do, and the price he paid.

So how does the story of the Magi at Jesus birth fold itself into our lives? Now a very good and obvious answer to this question is to say that it was the Magi's response to God in the leading of the star that brought us gentiles into the fold of salvation.

Yet I sought a more personal understanding of what the story of the Magi meant in our everyday life, so I asked Paul (my husband), what the story of the Magi meant to him – how it affected his life experience – if indeed it did.

“Oh I love the story of the magi! said Paul - what it means to me – what I learn from it in my daily life, is a steady way of perseverance. The Magi show us that. The Magi saw something they believed in, and they followed it, until they found it! “

And if we were to flesh out this wonderfully succinct understanding just a little - we might say that the Magi's steady perseverance overcame the adversities of a long, no doubt tedious journey -and perhaps we can connect this with our own life's journey, however long or short it has been – and they kept going, they persevered because they believed and trusted that they were being accompanied – led, and they found what they sought - the baby king - and in so doing brought you and me gentiles into the fold of salvation in Jesus Christ.

A fold, in which in this life, our hearts and minds can become a Bethlehem where Christ is continually born by the gift of faith. A fold in which we can look for a steady continuing newness in a tired, worn and waring world through a personal inner shift that provides for us a new perspective on things and people including ourselves, through kinder and more compassionate vision.

As the writings of Isaiah prophesied in a poem written 530 years before the birth of Christ – a poem that we claim today in the celebration of the Epiphany of our Lord: *Arise shine for your light has come and the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.*

And now we welcome Matthew, Ann and Michelle, Peter, Wendy .....as parents and grandparents as they bring their beloved son and grandson to be baptized into the glory of the Lord that is risen upon us in Christ Jesus.

The Lord be with you.