

Epiphany 2023

Creator of the heavens, who led the Magi by a star to worship the Christ-child: guide and sustain us, that we may find our journey's end in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sermon. Learning from the Magi. Revd David Treharne, Vicar.

Epiphany has had a bit of extra publicity this year due to the news coming out of Ukraine and Russia. For Orthodox Christians and for much of Europe the feast of Epiphany, when we remember the journey and arrival of the wise men to worship Jesus, is a massive festival... as big if not bigger than our 25th December Christmas celebrations.

The Feast of Epiphany is a very, very early feast. Indeed it predates the celebration of Christmas on the 25th December.

In the early Church, Christians, particularly those in the East, celebrated the birth of Jesus, the visit of the Magi, the Baptism of Christ and the Wedding of Cana all in one feast of the Epiphany on January 6th. By the fourth century, both Christmas and Epiphany had been set as separate feasts in some places. At the Council of Tours in 567, the Church set both Christmas day and Epiphany as feast days on 25 December and 6 January respectively and named the twelve days between the feasts as the Christmas season.

Over time, the Western Church separated things out leaving the celebration of the Epiphany to commemorate primarily the visit of the Magi to see the new born Christ on 6 January. Meanwhile, the Eastern Churches' celebration of Epiphany celebrates Christ's baptism and is one of the holiest feast days of the liturgical calendar – a manifestation/revelation of who Jesus is!

The feast and season of Epiphany has much to teach us.

Some things for us to chew over today...

1. **Christ is for all.** In the revelation to the Magi God in Christ is revealed and given not just to the Jews but to all nations and all peoples.
The Church Missionary Society and USPG published materials some years ago (Tudor may well have come across these) called "The Christ we Share." The material contains images of a white, black and Asian Christ, a happy and sad Christ, Christ through tribal eyes, a female Christ, a tortured Christ. Images of Christ from numerous parts of the world and in numerous contexts designed to illustrate that God in Christ is given, is revealed, is relevant to all peoples and his reign is for all peoples.

It is a critical point for us that Christ is for ALL and the Gospel is for ALL. Repentance, forgiveness, amendment of life, prayer and union with God... a new way of living with God with each other and with creations is made available for ALL: for royalty, for common folks, for old people, for young people, for the pious and sinners; for peoples north, south, east and west.

Christ and his kingdom is for you and for me.

We also learn from the Epiphany readings that although Christ is for all not everyone wants Christ e.g. Herod.

2. **The Joy of Christ.** Matthew 2:10 says "When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy." What we have hopefully been reminded of afresh these last couple of weeks is the coming of Christ into our lives... the beauty and the joy of realising... having an

Epiphany of who Jesus is ... is life changing and utterly wonderful. Receiving Christ (hands cupped for Communion), knowing God's Spirit/presence in daily life, in Scripture, in prayer, in worship, in service, in relationships, in community; his love, his peace, his life... within us... union/communion with God... and journeying through life with him in ups and downs... is extraordinary.

It is wonderful hearing testimony of how people have come to know God in their lives in all kinds of different ways. Hearing stories of how different people come to worship and adore Christ in their own lives is inspiring and helpful in our journeys of life and faith. Our stories will be different from one another but we can learn from each other and be thankful that God meets us in the right way for us.

3. **Journey.** Whilst faith in God, a knowledge and experience of God is absolutely wonderful most of us know that the journey of faith and life is not always absolutely wonderful. The story of the Magi brings this out very clearly.

Many scholars believe that the Magi probably came from Iran, Iraq or Arabia... and therefore travelled in the region of 1,000 miles in order to worship Christ. 4 months that was not luxury travel! Carrying expensive items such as gold, frankincense and myrrh would have made them targets for criminals. I wonder how many times they considered giving up, turning around and going home... and how much faith they had to summon up to keep going when things were tough? They also only had a star to follow... that was their sign.

When they got to Jerusalem they couldn't find Jesus at first and had to ask where he was. After 4 months they had to continue to search diligently for the child. More perseverance.

They also met Herod. Not an easy encounter and it must have been highly disturbing to receive a dream to return home avoiding Herod.

This year is dedicated to be a year of discipleship for us in the Parish. A chance to have additional focus on what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and journey through life with him as our Lord and Saviour.

The journey to find and follow Jesus as his disciples is not always easy. We will meet wonderful people, but we will also meet difficult and potentially destructive people. The journey of faith and life involves complicated characters and relationships, power and politics.

When the journey following Jesus seems too hard and the conditions too tough picture the Magi trudging over miles and miles determined to get to Jesus, hanging on to the sign they had been given.

When the road to transformation and holiness turns out to be longer than you thought it would be picture the Magi and their perseverance and determination.

When you meet difficult people and encounter brutality and abuse of power, and you encounter attempts to eliminate Christ and all that he came to bring, be reminded of the story of the Magi... that Christ came into the middle of brutality and that faith and politics can be a dangerous although necessary mix... with the contrasting reactions to the news of God's presence and intervention in life of Herod and the wise men giving us food for thought. Who will challenge the Herod's of our day and how?

When you don't know the way remember the Magi and their attentiveness and alertness to God... looking to the heavens and listening to God in their dreams to find the right way and the right response.

However tough the journey of faith is worth it! The Magi were overjoyed when they found the Lord (Matt 2:10). When we persevere and travel the Way and open our hearts and lives in worship and adoration we will be rewarded with the deep down joy that comes from knowing the presence of Christ and living for him.