

Epiphany 2019

Epiphany means manifestation. Today is the turn of the Wise Men – sometimes known as the magi – who will encounter the manifestation of God in the humanity of Jesus.

Matthew tells the story brilliantly using all the echoes of scripture to point to Jesus as the fulfilment of all that was promised. So what do we know about them?

They had been studying – astrology and ancient writings. They probably turned up – from the royal court of Babylonia, Persia - sometime after the shepherds – Matthew doesn't talk about 'the next day' – he introduces it as happening at the time of King Herod. The word used for child – wasn't the word used for babies – so with the fact that Herod wanted to kill babies 2 and under – we can think that Jesus would have been about 2 years old.

In Matthew 2:5-6 the Magi quote Micah 5:2 - *"They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet:*

*'And you, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
are by no means least among the leaders of Judah;
for out of you shall come forth a ruler
who will shepherd my people Israel.'"*

And this prophecy from Isaiah 60:6 – 'Herds of camels will cover your land, young camels of Midian and Ephah. And all from Sheba will come, bearing gold and incense and proclaiming the praise of the LORD.'

They would have also heard about Balaam's prophecy of a star that would announce the birth of a special King meant to be worshiped? (Numbers 24:17,19)

"I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near.
A star will come out of Jacob;
a scepter will rise out of Israel.

They followed that star – and the star which is actually the star of the show – pardon the pun! At start that had been promised way – the scripture says.

So what do we know about the **star**?

Well – did you see the programme over Christmas – Chris and Michaela – Under the Christmas Sky? I thought it would be a lovely way to think about the awe and wonder of Epiphany this year...

And so to prepare – just spend a few minutes taking yourself back to the time when these three wise men – astrologers – were swept into this incredible story of God's incarnation – his plan for salvation – for peace and hope and all things that we have come to see as signs and symbols of the birth of Jesus...

WATCH CLIP

Amazing, isn't it... and how devoted these wise men must have been to have prepared and studied and prayed and pondered and followed. And we can also take heart from them

We knew that:

They made an effort – they gave their time and energy to the interruption of God upon their lives who called them to worship the new born king...

We have much call on our lives these days – very time-poor – but do **we allow God to interrupt our lives** and genuinely respond to the call to worship – or do we just show up?

They came prepared – with gifts – we don't know if they understood the prophetic meaning of their gifts – but they were gifts of worship... **do we prepare our gifts** - do we offer them to share in the spiritual life of our church –our community – our world....

They were full of joy – after all the anticipation – the moment had come – they worshipped with joy and celebration – it's part of the deal of worship – **do we cultivate joy and worship?** If not – how can we?

They saw the child – they didn't just leave the gifts and go – they **encountered God in the face of Jesus** – and probably that deep connection was the life spring of the joy that followed as a result

They bowed down and worshipped – they opened their treasures – bowed down and worshipped – laying before him the most precious things they had – and what was the most precious things they offered – their gold, frankincense – myrrh? – No – **it was their heart** – their heart had been in the studying, the seeking – the pilgrimage – the finding – the worshipping – home is where the heart is...

And so – much learnt from the wise men – the priests from the east...

And think about this - along with all this wonder and awe and joy at witnessing such an profound moment in time don't you think it's a shame that back then all the chief priests and teachers of the law – who would have known the prophecies – in fact known them so well that they were able to tell the wise men where exactly to look, didn't follow the star – didn't make the trip themselves... They couldn't be bothered to travel from Judah to Bethlehem – 6 miles – to worship the promised messiah. But the foreigners – the Gentiles who had travelled miles and miles saw it as a transforming and holy experience...

And that's where we can find **our blessing** and gift from the example of this part of the nativity – we can look to the star of wonder – star of bright – that points to Bethlehem

And we can genuinely ask ourselves:

1. Have we seen the star?
2. Are we following the star & seeking Jesus?
3. Are we pointing others to the star & the Saviour?

Let us now complete our nativity story – let our wise men follow the star – open your hearts and walk with them on their journey home We put the Wise Men in their right place...

Maybe right now in your life you are seeking direction and wisdom for a decision you have to make. Life can change courses quite suddenly sometimes and leave us feeling lost – but we can take heart and seek out the light of wisdom, comfort and strength

WE CAN GO INTO THE NEW YEAR - AND TRY AND REMEMBER THAT every time we see a star - whether it's in God's night sky, on a tree – ON A CARD – OR ANYWHERE –

.let's be reminded to study – to pray – to seek and to follow and to arrive and bow down to Jesus in awe and wonder that this is the centre – the nativity where divinity and humanity kiss each other and fill us with the awe and wonder of heaven on earth – of God among us filling our hearts – our minds and all that we do - through the holy spirit of love and light. Let us ground the light of the star to become the light of our everyday world.

Let the Magi be symbols to us to seek and listen and follow our call – as we too pray – 'westward leading – still proceeding – guide us by your perfect light'