



EPIPHANY OF OUR LORD

Epiphany of our LORD 2021

January 3, 2021
Anglican Parish of Raymond Terrace
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Pray:

May I speak to you in the name of GOD – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen



Our aim on this Feast of the Epiphany is to recognise that just as the wise men came from the East to worship JESUS, so all nations – that means all of us – can come to worship Him.

In the history of Israel, the Exile forms a counterpoint – a notable contrast – to the Exodus. During the Exodus, the people became a nation with the hope of the Promised Land and a place to serve GOD. By the time of the Exile, it had all gone wrong. Land and Temple, promises, covenant, self-respect and confidence, all seemed to have been torn from their grasp. Their failure to obey GOD and walk in His ways had brought judgement upon the nation. Isaiah's prophecy offers exhilarating hope to the exiles in Babylon. Light is the main image. GOD's glory will rise to shine once again upon Israel while the

Gentiles will experience only darkness. They will recognise that Israel is the source of light and wisdom. The prophet urges Israel to look up and see not only their own sons and daughters returning from Exile, but also the arrival of the Gentiles bringing gifts and honour.

The arrival of the Magi in Bethlehem is clearly presented as a partial fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy. There are unmistakable echoes of Isaiah in Matthew's account. The Magi – or wise men – bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh – though myrrh, which is used to embalm bodies after death, isn't mentioned in the Isaiah passage. The star which guides them echoes the prophecy of light. Matthew twice uses the language of "rising". Tradition, though not Matthew, has it that they arrived on camels – which clearly echoes Isaiah 60:6. Tradition calls them "kings" which also probably owes more to Isaiah since Matthew calls them "Magi". They come to see the hoped-for King of the Jews, the Messiah, who was the realisation of Jewish hopes. Israel's hope is fulfilled in this child and the nations come to bring their

wealth and gifts as they seek to participate in Israel's blessing.



The first human word spoken in Matthew's gospel is the one the wise men address to Herod: "WHERE is the child born king of the Jews?" it is also the response of Herod when he summons the chief priests and scribes and his Jerusalem supporters – generalised to "all Jerusalem". But the 2 questions are spoken from very different hearts. Herod is panic-stricken at the thought of losing his power to another "king of the Jews" and is desperate to know "where" this threat lurks. It is some of the same group of people that Matthew will later describe Herod as summoning to help him plot the death of JESUS and who will mock Him at the cross. In contrast, the wise men are Gentile, perhaps Persian seekers and aristocratic scholars, who have no concern with status or ethnicity. Their question of "WHERE?" is a sign of their genuine search for a new king so that they can come and pay Him homage. They also have the humility to come to

Jerusalem to add to their foreign and pagan wisdom the wisdom of the Hebrew Scriptures to help them in their search. In the wolfish company of Herod and his cohorts, Matthew sees the wise men as witnesses to the later call of JESUS for all His disciples to be as shrewd as serpents and simple as doves¹.

The search of the wise men from the East begins with a sign in the skies and the guiding wisdom of pagan astrology. It ends with a Child of earth to whom they are led by both the star and the light of Hebrew Scriptures. Whether Matthew intended it or not, later tradition has seen in the gifts a hint of the paschal mystery – one of the central concepts of our faith relating to the history of salvation. Its main subject is the passion, death and Resurrection of JESUS – the work that GOD the Father sent His Son to accomplish on earth. Those gifts were gold – a fitting gift for a King; frankincense – for the fragrancng of sacrifices and burning before the holy of

¹ Matthew 10:16

holies; and myrrh for embalming the body of CHRIST in the tomb.

Their human “dreams” were fulfilled by their visit to the Child. GOD touches their spirit in a dream that warns them of Herod’s hypocrisy so that they do not return to Jerusalem to tell him the WHERE of JESUS but to return to their own country by another way.

When we place the magi in our Nativity Scene, they are usually dressed in opulent robes and have black, yellow and brown faces. For the number or the physical appearance of the wise men we have no biblical evidence – but the truth that their visit declares, and the symbolism that their presence in the Nativity Scene proclaims, is the gospel truth that JESUS is king for all the nations of the earth. That is what we pray for in the words of Psalm 72 – the establishment of GOD’s kingdom of justice and peace throughout the world so that the rights of the poor and helpless are respected and the cries of the needy are answered.

So, at the beginning of a new year, in the story of the Epiphany – the story of the revelation of JESUS to the magi – how can we encourage each other to be more eager to seek GOD? How can we improve our listening to the Word of GOD and each other – in what ways might we respond – both in homage and through gifts – to the revelation of CHRIST within our midst? WHERE and WHEN must there be both a birth and a death in our Christian lives as we gaze on the Christmas Child and recognise the mystery of the adult CHRIST for adult Christians?

The magi arrive in Bethlehem intent upon finding the ‘newborn king of the Jews’ who has been revealed to them by the light of a star. Upon encountering Him with His mother, Mary, they are not content to only fall down in worship – they also desire to offer something tangible to the child. From their treasures, they present him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. In our own unique ways, we, too, have encountered the child of Bethlehem. We find Him in the faces of those we hold dear, within

the faces of the children I baptised yesterday, within the sacrament of the eucharist, and within our very hearts. While we find within our readings historical events in which Jews AND Gentile – thus ALL the people of the world – are brought together by the light of CHRIST, we are still waiting for the fullness of Isaiah’s prophecy to take place in which the radiance of GOD’s peace will eradicate the darkness of violence, war and bloodshed. As we wait for the fullness of GOD’s Kingdom, we are invited to work for the peace and unity that GOD dreams for the world. During the year, I have spoken about how the Jews refused to believe in JESUS and tried to persecute Him; whereas the Gentiles accepted the Gospel when it was preached to them. In our passage today, the Jewish rulers are represented by Herod and his cohort while the wise men, represented the Gentiles by approaching JESUS with a humbleness of heart – so as to get to know JESUS rather than to try and get a power advantage over Him.



May we pray:

Gracious God, the magi were the first Gentiles to witness your salvation. Christ's saving presence has since spread throughout the world. May we, like the magi, never cease to celebrate the gift of salvation we have received in your Son, our LORD JESUS CHRIST – who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one GOD, now and forever. Amen

Daily Prayer 2020

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