

Epiphany, Year B

Pray

The story of the Wise Men visiting Jesus is a familiar one, the final part of the nativity we've seen and understood over the last few weeks. Even if we recognise that the wise men come much later than the Shepherds, we still perhaps gloss over them. The real interest and remarkableness of the Magi is often lost on us in a haze of post-Christmas and New Year, New Me focus. But their story is remarkable and one we can learn much about our own journeys from.

Let's remind ourselves again about the Magi, they're a group of wise men from the East. The bible doesn't actually say how many of them there are: just how many gifts they're carrying. They saw the Star rise and followed it knowing that it was guiding them to the King of the Jews. Now it's not that likely that these men were Jews themselves. Yet they still recognised the importance of this star and the birth it marked. They studied the Jewish scriptures and writings meaning that they knew enough to recognise what was happening; even when others did not! They were indeed wise! But also, they're not perhaps men who respectable Jewish families would be completely pleased to see! They're foreigners, outsiders, men who are happy to call on Herod... a man who is no friend to the Jews. Yet they still knew just how special Jesus was and were willing to come and worship him. Their interest was not simply academic... if it were then they could have sent someone else to look for them! They probably had the means to organise this. But they were so sure that the child being born was incredibly special that they undertook a long, potentially risky and probably expensive

journey themselves bring expensive gifts with them too. This is impressive in itself.

I wonder- How far do we go out of our way to encounter Jesus? We travel to Church or at least to the Church YouTube channel... yes. And that's a good and positive thing, we're making space in our lives to take time out to follow Jesus. Something that in 2020 could so easily have slipped away. I felt challenged by this reading though over whether or not I could go a little further? Perhaps I could journey deeper or farther... To do a little more, read a little more or even to simply be silent in the presence of God a little more... I don't think I, or you, are going to be called upon to travel Westward in search of Christ! But perhaps this New Year we are being called to do a little journeying to encounter Jesus more?

The Wise Men travelled a long way and before they reached Jesus, they first visited Herod... The fact that they kept this deep faith when they arrived at Herod's palace and realised the baby wasn't there is also notable. Their expectations that Jesus would have been born in a royal palace to influential parents were wrong. Yet instead of being put off they continue to seek after him. Finding him in Bethlehem, with Mary and Joseph... Well I wonder if that did much to confirm who Jesus was? Perhaps it did... Or perhaps they had enough faith to believe anyway, in face of a baby who showed no definitive promise of the future predicted.

A future hoped for. Just like 2021. How much hope hangs in this year? How many reorganised plans are made for this year? How many of you, like me, are determined to make this year a good year. A better year. But the New Year dawns with COVID-19 restrictions. There is a chance some of our rearranged plans

might not happen. We're still not able to visit our vulnerable friends and family... Still not able to sing in Church. But we have hope. I have hope. Hope that all our dreams, and wishes for 2021 are founded on firm ground. I have wondered where God is in our world over the last few months. Just sometimes. The Magi looked at a baby and saw God in our world. They had confidence and faith... A confident faith that the future promises made about Jesus would come true. Just as I remind myself regularly to have faith in the promises I know to be true in scripture. God's mercies are new every morning. Jesus came to bring us life and life in abundance... Even if they don't look the way I'm expecting them too, I have faith that they are true.

After encountering Christ, worshipping him and giving him gifts, the wise men: we learn from this morning's gospel portion returned to their home by another road. God warned them in a dream not to return to Herod. They were still willing to listen and to learn. And very simply put their encounter with God changed their path. I have a lot of perhaps unrealistic hope for this year. I have a lot stored up in 2021 and great is my hope that what I desire will be possible. But I want more than anything for these desires and for myself to be tempered and changed by Christ. I'd like his presence in my life to bring me to new paths and new ways of thinking and seeing the world. The Magi had incredible faith. We can learn so much from them, and my prayer for myself and for you is that we do. That we are prompted to journey more with Christ and to seek him more and more in 2021. Amen.