

Reflections for 3rd January 2021 – Epiphany

Wise Men and Pilgrims

This Sunday we mark the feast of the Epiphany, which is actually on January 6th – the twelfth day of Christmas. ‘Epiphany’ means something being revealed, or made clear, so at this time we remember the place of the magi in the nativity stories, and what is revealed by their journey to find and worship of Jesus.

And as we do that, it may help us to step back from all the ways that we are used to seeing the nativity portrayed, and look again at what the gospel of Matthew tells us – and doesn’t tell us – about these ‘magi’, these wise men. They studied sacred texts, and watched the movements of the stars, looking for signs of major events in the world. We don’t know where they came from, except that it was from somewhere east of Jerusalem, and we don’t know how many of them there were! The gospel tells us that they brought three gifts, but it does not say how many wise men there were. What we do know is that they had a long and hazardous journey, and encountered more danger, from King Herod and his court, than they had expected.

And, I would like to say, the wise men were pilgrims. A pilgrim is someone who goes on a physical journey of some kind, which is at the same time a spiritual journey, seeking to draw closer to God. They certainly went on a challenging physical journey, and they were seeking new signs of the presence of God in the world.

Pilgrimage is a powerful image for our life of faith, and our journey through life – a journey that is both with and towards God. So I would like to encourage us, as we remember the journey of the wise men, to reflect on our journey through the year that has just ended. However hard the last year has been for each one of us, there are still things that we can be thankful for, and things that we can learn as we reflect on it. And as we begin this new year, with all the fears and hopes that we may carry with us, we can set out with hearts and minds open to meet God, and travel with God, through the journey of the year ahead.

Revd John Waller

As with gladness men of old
Did the guiding star behold,
As with joy they hailed its light,
Leading onward, beaming bright;
So, most gracious Lord, may we
Evermore be led to thee. Amen.

Bible readings: Isaiah 60. 1-6; Ephesians 3. 1-12; Matthew 2. 1-12

Story: ‘The Wise Men’s Visit’ (based on the gospel passage)