

3 January 2021



EPIPHANY 2021

A REFLECTION FROM JOHN

Isaiah 60:1-6

Matthew 2:1-12

Today, we celebrate the Christian festival of Epiphany, a tradition that began in Rome almost 1700 years ago.

The word Epiphany is Greek, and it means 'The sudden appearance of a great God'. The realisation that a great truth is amongst us.

Epiphany recalls the visit of the Three Wise men to the infant Jesus. The account is found in Matthew's Gospel and barely needs recalling.

The first to visit Jesus were the shepherds. They were poor, Jewish people, whose way of life was dismissed by others. Shepherding was work few chose to do. It was lonely and sometimes dangerous, yet these simple, uneducated and poor men were the first to arrive at Bethlehem.

Somewhat later, a second group of visitors arrived. They were so different from the shepherds. They were wise men. We understand them to be educated, influential and non-Jewish. They came from a different land, tradition, race and culture to all the others in the Christmas story.

They were curious, they studied and followed the stars. Church tradition often calls them magi – an ancient word for star gazers.

The bible doesn't identify their number, but it is traditionally set at three because of the gifts they bring.

Interestingly, the Bible identifies them as wise men, not Kings. The king notation comes from a later Christian assumption, linked to the Book of Psalms, foretelling that Kings will fall-down before the Messiah.

Our traditional picture is of three men, on camels, travelling across deserts. However, Mathews Gospel tells us no more than they came from the East.

We are told they travelled to the court of King Herod, guided by a star, looking for a child, born to be king.

Herod and his advisors directed the wise men to Bethlehem,
There they offered their gifts of Gold, Frankincense and myrrh.

To prevent the jealous Herod from knowing of the child they returned another way.

And so, the Gospel story ends.
Tradition has assigned much to this narrative.
We can only speculate.

But elsewhere, scripture has more to say.
The wise men came in fulfilment of the prophets.

The OT reading for today is from Isaiah chapter 60.
Just six verses, from three wonderful, prophetic chapters, that speak the Good News
of deliverance.

Isaiah says: -
'Nations will be drawn to your light,
And Kings to the dawning of your new day'.

It is from these passages of Isaiah and Matthew that the celebration of Epiphany is
developed.
Together they speak a great truth.
God has come amongst us in human form.
The wise men sought and found.
They asked questions and were answered.

This Christmas, my family bought me the most unexpected, yet most welcomed of
presents - a telescope.
I can now see the night sky more clearly.
Last Sunday, there was a cloudless evening.
I was able to view the craters and mountains of the moon.
The redness of Mars.
And watch the two giant planets, Jupiter and Saturn, as they disappeared together
over the early evening horizon.
As I become more competent, I hope to identify stars, galaxies and nebula.
To seek a chosen light in the dark night sky.

It was a star that led the wise men to Bethlehem.
To seek a humble child who came as a light to brighten the darkness.
To show us the nature of God and to become the means of our salvation.

May Christ's light shine in our darkness, and may it slowly and steadily, lead us to the
very presence of God.