

Epiphany 2024 Jan 7th

Readings: Isaiah 60: 1-6 Ephesians 3: 1-12 Matthew 2: 1-12 **Theme: Showing to the world/ Calling**

One of our family traditions is to go for a walk on New Year's Day! Over the years this has taken many different forms, and we have experienced varied weather, especially when in Derbyshire. This year luckily was reasonably dry but very muddy underfoot. We don't always succeed in following a planned walk, and my family are skeptical in that I will successfully get them home without losing our way and journeying down the wrong path. This year our walk took us to Addington Church and back. We explored the churchyard for Archbishops and Martin took his picture of Stephen Langton signing the Magna Carta, particularly significant for him as one of his first major musicals was on the story of Stephen Langton and the legend that surround the Silent Pool and Friday Street on the way from Dorking to Guildford. Anyway this particular walk from our house was fairly straightforward so I didn't need a map as I trusted the footpaths we followed would lead us the right way, and so they did, allowing us to get back for lunch without a hitch. As we walked there and back though there was time to think, chat, and reflect, on the last year and the year to come. Journeys are like that, they take you away from your current position as you move on.

Today we celebrate another kind of journey... we remember the journey of the wise men, yes, **and** this also calls us to think about our spiritual journeys.

We do not know much about the wise men, we only know that they came from East of the Holy Land and that they were searching. Searching for something that would help them make sense of their world, and in so doing proclaim what they found to the whole world.

Matthew is the only Gospel writer to refer to their visit to pay homage to the Christ child. These visitors were different from the earlier visitors of shepherds who were ordinary Jews smelling of sheep and probably not able to read or write. These men were almost in total contrast, they were Magi, spiritual leaders, they were also Gentiles. They may have been rich, they may have been clever, they may have been men of authority, but, above all, they were seekers. They needed something else in their lives. Through their journey and "a cold coming they had of it" they were searching, seeking something that would guide them. They needed a living relationship with their God. **St Augustine of Hippo reminds us that we are all seekers when he says, 'You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in you.'**

In their quest these men searched the stars at night and the earth by day, they spent time

and energy, they risked their lives by travelling at night. Some must have laughed at them, others must have scorned their search, but they would not be put off. They followed a calling.

They **didn't** know where they were going but they did know whom they were seeking. Were they wise? They went to the wrong place and the wrong person. They went to the capital, Jerusalem, and to King Herod. Herod's title was 'king of the Jews'. So what a question to ask, "Where is he who is to be born king of the Jews?" Herod hadn't a clue but he knew who would know about the Messiah, about the Christ. He asked the chief priests and scribes. They told him, "In Bethlehem in the land of Judah."

Lucky for the wise men it was only about seven miles away. Herod sent them off and told them to search diligently for the child and to tell him when they had found him. Fortunately, the wise men did not trust Herod or his interest in the Christ child and later did not tell Herod where Jesus was.

From Jerusalem they journeyed on to Bethlehem. At last they were able to offer themselves and their gifts; their search was over and they could return home rejoicing.

Many of the Jews believed that the Christ would only be for their own nation: they were the chosen people and no other. Yet throughout the Scriptures there are suggestions that the Christ was for all peoples. In leading the wise men to Jesus, God makes good the promise to Abraham and Sarah that their descendants would be a light and a blessing to the nations.

Today's readings are chosen to show this. Isaiah asks the Jews to arise and shine because their light has come, and nations and kings will come to the light. He even says they will bring gifts of gold and frankincense. Saint Paul in the letter to the Ephesians which you can read on the pew sheet, says "To make everyone see what the plan of the mystery ... is so that the wisdom of God may be made known to the rulers and authorities "and that the Gentiles become now fellow heirs to share in the promise of Christ through the gospel."

The fulfilment of the prophecy is seen in the coming of the wise men, who are Gentiles, to the Christ. They **were** the first of the rest of the world. **Like the Wise men**, our lives cannot be really fulfilled if we do not know our God. We **need** to seek out his presence and come before him. Like the wise men, we may take a few wrong turnings, we may be laughed at, scorned or put in danger, but we must not be put off until we come before him and know him.

Through the visit of the wise men, Jesus was being revealed to the rest of the world. It helps

us to see **that** God calls all peoples, to come to him ~ rich and poor, the known and the stranger, simple and wise; all are invited to come to God.

A new year, calls us to look back as well as forward... In 2024 we are still faced with challenges for peace around the world, the fighting in the Holy Land has continued and we continue to have to bear responsibility for preserving our environment and reduce the effects of climate change. This is so vitally important for the survival of future generation, and the consequences of not doing anything will lead to us all into very uncertain years ahead. And we continue to witness the arrival of asylum seekers on those small boats those families, children, young people who have had to flee from their own countries and embark on treacherous journey's to find a safe haven. And as Jesus was a refugee, fleeing into Egypt, our prayers are with all those fleeing Gaza and other places of conflict. But we can all play our small part, in our prayers, our compassion, we can show hospitality to our neighbours and we can use our gifts for the benefit of others that can affect change for the good.

So what gifts do you bring? As we embark on the next few weeks during Epiphany, the Season of Lay Ministry, perhaps it is a time to explore a calling, recognise a talent/ gift and seek to develop it further. To reexamine where God might be calling you. On your spiritual journey where will God take you? If you were visiting the manger today what would you bring? **“If I were Shepherd I would bring a lamb, If I were a wise man I would do my part, but what I can I give him, give my heart”** so we sing from the Carol In the bleak mid- winter.

So our Journey, or our metaphorical New Year's Walk can lead us into the realization of our faith in Christ, of the hope that this brings not just to ourselves but to all people in the sharing of the gospel. We can share this hope with those who journey by offering our gifts, through our generosity and a desire to Love one another.

We live in a world of contrasts. For our Christian faith to be lived out, we **NEED** to show the world our love. We do that by the way we live our lives and by the dedication and perseverance we show in the service of others.

If we offer the gifts of love, joy, hope, if we follow a call. Jesus will be revealed to us by our generosity of spirit and by **BEING** our continual guide through our own life's journeys.