

## Epiphany

4 1 15

O God,  
who by the leading of a star  
manifested your only Son to the peoples of the earth:  
mercifully grant that we,  
who know you now by faith,  
may at last behold your glory face-to-face.

Our text this morning may be found in Matthew chapter 2 and verse 11:

‘ . . . they saw the child with Mary his mother . . . ’

And so we come to the Epiphany. In the East, wise men have seen the rising of the star. They recognise it as the star that heralds the birth of the King of the Jews. They journey westwards to Jerusalem, the Jewish capital. They speak to Herod the King. No royal birth here to speak of. They continue on towards Bethlehem led by the star. Where the star stops so do they and, on entering the house, they find the child they have been seeking.

You know the story well. Me too – for some sixty years ! I even played a king in the nativity play as a boy in my East London Primary School. In those days, there were no black boys in our class and so, like some Black and White Minstrel, I was blacked up with make-up. As an adult, what encourages me so much in this story is the fact that non-Jews, Gentiles, recognised the birth of the Messiah and were

mindful, motivated, to make the journey to pay their respects to him, to give him their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh: gold for kingship, frankincense for priesthood, myrrh for his death. The Messiah's birth is not just for Jews but has universal relevance, significance, importance.

But this morning let me focus on the word Epiphany. A noun in Greek –επιφάνεια (epiphania) – manifestation. To manifest, to show, a shewing. What those astrologers, astronomers, saw was an event in the heavens which, according to their understanding, pointed to the birth of the Jewish Messiah. They had eyes to see and minds to understand and the will to act. They saw the star and then went off to find for themselves what the star was shewing them and in our verse today, we see that they found him: **'they saw the child with Mary his mother'**.

There are several arguments for the existence of God and depending on what convinces you, they may or may not succeed. You could argue that God has to exist because to be truly, fully, what it is for God to be God, then existence is a necessary precondition of the definition (the Ontological Argument). You could argue that the universe, the world we live in, we ourselves, all exist so if we do, then there needs to be something that caused it all in the first place, a first cause, and that uncreated creator is God (the Cosmological Argument). You could argue that the whole universe, not least the world we live in, is an ordered whole, governed by physical laws and that that order is not the product of random chance but the conscious plan of a designer God (the Design Argument). Well, philosophy is there to address such big questions.

But, for me, the really convincing argument that God exists is the one rooted in Religious Experience. If God exists, then we ought to be able to experience him. Here, in Dinard, surely the beauty and majesty of the sea and this coastline are ways to experience God. When people during the week walk through the doors of our church, what do they experience ? Prayerful silence and a sense of otherness. When we come to church on Sunday to worship, isn't there the warmth of welcome, of fellowship, a sense of communion, of being in the presence of God ? Individuals may be touched at different times in different ways - no least in the extraordinary healing that Ailsa and Jean have experienced.

So, today, when we remember that God was made manifest to the wise men in the rising of a star and in the presence of a baby boy in his mother's arms, we could also reflect on our own experience of God and ask whether we find that convincing.

I pray he may show us the way to him.

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

*4<sup>th</sup> January, 2015*

G: Sermons 31 : Epiphany

