

Made manifest

8 1 17

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 may be found in today's gospel from St Matthew, chapter 2, verse 2:

'For we observed his star at its rising . . . '

January 8th, 2017. So, today, do we celebrate the feast of the Epiphany which falls as well you know, every year on the 6th January and can be transferred to the nearest Sunday or do we celebrate the Baptism of Christ which falls on the First Sunday of Epiphany which this year is 8th January ?

To be honest, I prefer celebrating Epiphany because, to my mind, Epiphany makes Christmas complete with the end of the journey of the wisemen, first to Jerusalem and then to Bethlehem. The Baptism of Jesus is good, too, with its reminder that Jesus is setting us an example of baptism as being the start of a public recognition of our faith – something we ought to do because it is the right thing to do. But this morning, I'd like to cheat by briefly reflecting on the fact that both celebrations point to this same, simple fact: that God makes himself manifest to

Man and to make manifest, to shew is essentially, precisely what the Greek word *επιφάνεια* (epiphania) actually means.

In the story of the Magi, we have Gentile astrologers in the east observing the rising of a new star in the east and concluding that this is an astrological sign that the long-awaited, Jewish Messiah has been born. So they set off westwards with their three gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh to pay due respect to such an important figure in the history of mankind. Star-led, helped by Herod, they find the baby boy and give him these three symbols of who Jesus truly is: gold for kingship; frankincense for priesthood; myrrh to embody his death. Then, an angel warns them in a dream not to return to Jerusalem to inform Herod where the boy is so they return home eastwards without doing so.

In the account of the baptism of Jesus, we have the surprising fact that Jesus is seeking baptism from John. Baptism has its roots in a mikvah, a Jewish rite of purification by washing in water – a symbolic cleansing of the dirt of sin and wrong-doing, a sign of repentance of past wrong-doing, and a desire to start a new life afresh, purified. John is doubly reluctant to baptise Jesus. Firstly, because John knows that Jesus needs no washing away of his sins for Jesus is without sin. Secondly, John has recognised before either of them were born that his cousin, Jesus, is the Messiah and it is he, John, who should be washed clean by Jesus, not the other way round. But Jesus is setting us an example to follow and John does do what he is asked to do. And, if the fact of Jesus being Messiah has already been made manifest to John, then at the baptism there is another epiphany. As Jesus emerges from the water, a dove descends from the sky to

alight on him and a voice from on high proclaims that 'This is my son in whom I am well pleased.' Now I do wonder who, at that time, actually saw and heard these wonderful affirmations of who Jesus is. If not to the crowd who witnessed the event then, it has been passed in down to us by those who subsequently heard of this epiphany.

So let me reflect that this year on the 8th January, we don't have to chose between celebrating Epiphany or the Baptism of Christ because we can celebrate both because both are a manifestation of who and what Jesus is – the Son of God, our Lord and Saviour – Amen

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

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

8th January 2017

G: Sermons 35 :Made manifest

