

## Epiphany

7 1 18

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 and is Matthew chapter 2 and verse 1:

‘ . . . wise men from the East. . . ’

If last week, we remembered the circumcision of our Lord Jesus Christ a day early, then this week, on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January, we are remembering the feast of the Epiphany a day late. If the naming and circumcision of Christ is important to remind us of our Christian roots in Judaism, then Epiphany is important to remind us that from the time of Jesus' birth, there was a clear vision that the covenant relationship between God and Man was inclusive not exclusive: that the love of God expressed in the birth of his Son, Jesus Christ was not just for his chosen people the Jews but embraced Gentiles too.

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> February, the season of Epiphany ends with Candlemas – when Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the Temple when he was forty-days-old to make the required sacrifice of two turtle doves in thanks-giving for his birth.

There, they met Simeon, an old, godly man, who had been promised that he would not die until he had beheld God's Messiah face-to-face. And he did ! Inspired to come to the Temple, he met Mary and Joseph and held the baby Jesus in his arms and prophesied that Jesus would 'be a light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of his people Israel'. And in these prophetic words is confirmation of the rightness of the journey of the Magi from the East to Jerusalem then on to Bethlehem.

What is wonderful, extraordinary about the story of the Wise Men is that they saw astrological, astronomical evidence of the birth of someone special. That star rising in the East was new to them, to these experienced astronomers, knowledgeable astrologers, who knew the night sky like the back of their hands. Whether or not the phenomenon was Halley's comet or not is open to debate but the fact is that in their way of making sense of reality, they saw something special was happening which was heralded in this out of the ordinary phenomenon.

So in our gospel accounts of the nativity is a balance. Luke's gospel records the adoration of the shepherds, good, faithful Jews called from the hillside above Bethlehem to come down to the town to see for themselves their long-expected messiah - a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger for a crib. In Mathew's gospel, Magi, wise men, called from the East by the star they were observing, called to journey westwards in search of the Messiah. They bring him gifts of gold frankincense and myrrh: three gifts which suggest there were in fact three of them though Matthew never actually mentions how many there were. This balance of strange visitors at Christ's nativity confirms the truth of our faith

as Christians, succinctly summed up in John's gospel, chapter 3 and verse 16 that  
'God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever  
believeth in him would not perish but have everlasting life.'

Christianity is a faith where all are welcome, where all are free to choose whether  
or not to believe in Jesus as our Saviour and then come home to him. May that be  
true for all of us here today.

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

*Preached at the Eucharist*

*St Bartholomew's, Dinard*

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G: Sermons 37 : Epiphany

