

## Epiphany

I wonder how many times you have said, or have had said to you, Happy New Year. It is always a bit of an unknown, how long it is into the new year, when it is right to stop sharing this greeting. I have had mixed responses to when I have greeted people with this: one person replied, quite miserably – “What’s happy about it!?”; another, quite upbeat, launched into a long list of all the New Year’s Resolutions they had made - most of which they have now, apparently, failed to keep.

Epiphany marks the manifestation of God to the world in the child Jesus. It is a time when we are encouraged to look forward, not just to the *year* ahead of us, but to *growing our faith*. Epiphany is a season in the Church where the readings are brimming with newness and expectation about Jesus: there is his calling of disciples, his miracle at the wedding at Cana, the young Jesus in the Temple and of course today: the story of the Magi’s journey to visit him.

Epiphany then, encourages us to be upbeat about both the year ahead, our own journeys of faith and how God will be further revealed to us in them.

## Readings

On this Epiphany Sunday all of our readings are pointing forwards with expectation of a new and hopeful future, if different to how we might imagine, expect or want them to be.

God reveals to the prophet Isaiah that despite the misery and catastrophe of the Jewish exile from Jerusalem, a new, grand future awaits the Jewish people. True it won’t be like it used to be, there can be no nostalgic hankering. This new future will be even grander because those from other nations will finally recognise the one true God whose light will shine to all peoples.

But, of course, this went far beyond nationhood, geography and international status. This light was a person, not a country. It was not an easy message to comprehend.

And St Paul, writing to the early Christians picks up on this theme in his letter to the Ephesians.

For the Church to grow, it was no longer limited to those purely of Jewish heritage. He reveals how the Gospel of Jesus is open to all who would believe and follow in faith. His gentile readers in Ephesus, and in many other places, were now invited to join in, to accompany Paul and the other apostles on their new journeys of faith. The prejudices and rules from yesteryear are now effectively a thing of the past – God was doing new things which *they* can now be a part of.

And Matthew, was addressing his community at the time the Jewish faith was picking up the pieces following the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. There were difficult debates and decisions to make on how to put those pieces back together. Into this he offers the story of the visit of the Magi.

## **Magi**

The Magi were people who would have been traditionally thought of as ‘other than’, or gentiles, those outside the Jewish faith and heritage. And Matthew makes this blatant.

Unlike the chief priests and scribes of Herod’s court, the Magi do not know the scriptures of Israel and the prophesy of the Messiah’s birth being in Bethlehem. They are astrologers from the east and have recognised in some way that this star they have followed means something significant. So they head for the obvious place for a king: Jerusalem.

Their reaction is not one of hostility, that’s left for Herod, but instead to pay homage. When they arrive at the place where the Holy family were staying, they were overjoyed and did indeed pay homage to this

new king, who was not from Jerusalem and was less than two years old.

The story of the Magi told Matthews first audiences and remind us that the Gospel, the good news of Jesus, is on offer to the whole world and it invites us to respond.

The Magi responded initially to the star with curiosity – working out what it meant. Then they took a risk -setting out on a long, potentially dangerous journey. When they got a bit lost, they persevered, and when they finally arrived, they offered Jesus what they had. And they were indeed wise, trusting in the message revealed to them in their dreams and, possibly guided by their instincts, following their meeting with Herod and all these unusual circumstances. They did not return to Herod.

Despite their own heritage and religion, they were open to God, or whatever *they* took for God, to reveal something to them that would change their lives and perhaps the lives of others.

## **2024**

Epiphany is something which has greater richness and more significance than New Year. We too can enter into Epiphany if we decide to follow the star that shines away, hopefully and invitingly, in the heavens of our hearts and minds.

Will we, like the Magi, have the curiosity to look for it and the courage to risk following it. Who knows where it might lead us.

Epiphany is the opportunity to accept an invitation from God for God to be revealed *afresh* in our lives of faith and in the life of our Church. So, instead of making a long list of New Years Resolutions, of which we will probably fall short, we can make at least one Epiphany commitment.

A commitment to seek God afresh by bringing our gifts to God in a new way.

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And this doesn't have to be in the obvious places, the Jerusalems, if you like, but maybe in the unobvious places, the Bethlehems of our lives and communities.

### **Revelation**

Epiphany, and the Magi, remind us that the more we commit to seeking God, the more curious we are, the more risks we take, and even the more mistakes we make in the process, *the more God will be revealed to us.*

So may this Epiphany inspire us all to follow the star, open up our treasure chests and bring our gifts to Jesus. Amen.

Rev'd Richard Haynes 7 January 2024. Epiphany.