

St Matthew Ch. 2 vs. 1-12, Isaiah ch. 60. 1-6, Ephesians ch. 3: 1-12.

Every year many people make the pilgrimage to Bethlehem. I watched one pilgrimage on television where the presenter admitted to not having a religious faith. However, when he reached Bethlehem he told us that he was moved to tears. He peered in, just like many others who queued to do so, into the place where it is claimed Jesus was born which is now down below the present ground level. All who were on that pilgrimage and some of you maybe went on a journey to that place went on a search for the Child Jesus.

Our bible reading today speaks of that search, all those many years ago, by the Wise Men, for this same child. It was their desire to find him, and as they said: ‘to pay him homage;’ in other words to worship him. And they brought their gifts. Their gifts were prophetic about his future. They brought Gold, a symbol of kingship and a symbol of power, they gave of their wealth to this child and they gave in faith believing that he was sent from God. Kingship and Power have always been difficult and troublesome aspects of humankind’s existence. If we think about the time when Joseph and Mary fled into Egypt, to save Jesus from the death threatened him by Herod, we can see that when a Ruler’s power is at risk violent action

is more than likely to take place. We can think of another Herod before whom Jesus stood later in his life on trial for treason because Jesus seemed to be a threat to his power.

A further gift the Wise Men brought was Frankincense: this was the priestly gift, a type of incense used in religious ceremonies to give honour to that which was considered holy. And if there is one thing that singles Jesus out it is his holiness; that unassailable essence of God. So they recognised Jesus as the Holy One of God; the promised Messiah, the One who was to come as it stood written in the texts of the prophets. Their other gift was Myrrh: an ointment which was used to heal but was also used for embalming those who had died. So these

gifts spoke of the life and death of Jesus; a life which was in so many ways just like every other life and because of this He can identify with us whatever our feelings or circumstances. He is the one who can say: 'Yes I know how you feel,' the One who entered the world in poor and simple surroundings yet with so much promise for the future. The One whose life was also very different, different inasmuch as he did not have a sinful nature and his mission was to reconcile all of us through his death and resurrection to a Holy God.

And so today we celebrate the Epiphany literally 'the showing forth of Christ,' this special time when we focus on the ways in which Christ is revealed to us because, yes,

that is what it means and that is what it is about, revelation or manifestation: Christ being made known; in this instance to the Wise Men. However, I'm sure that each of us who believes in Jesus Christ has an Epiphany story. Jesus is revealed to some people through miracles or unique experiences of God's grace. He is revealed to some when the Gospel is preached and they are moved to a response of faith. He is often revealed through our own sufferings, through bible reading or hearing a story of the life of another person. He is revealed through the prayer and worship of the church, through our own prayers and in many many other ways. So the Epiphany is an ongoing

experience as we persevere in our life of prayer, service and worship.

And our Epiphanies change us; and is that not why Christ came and why he was made known, why he was manifested and why he was revealed to the Wise Men. They went on their pilgrimage and searched, just as we continue to search, in the hope that we might be transformed and become more like him.

Amen.

