

Hello, and welcome to this short time of reflection and prayer from the Wirksworth Team Ministry. I'm Canon David Truby Rector of the Team, and it's my privilege to offer you this message for Epiphany Sunday.

We will begin with the Collect for the Day, followed by the Gospel reading set for this Sunday, then my reflection and some prayer time at the end. So let us pray:

Collect

Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ-child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our journey's end
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

A reading from Matthew 2: 1-12

In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, 'Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage.' When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:
"And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
are by no means least among the rulers of Judah;
for from you shall come a ruler
who is to shepherd my people Israel." '

Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage.'

When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Reflection

Today, we celebrate Epiphany, the arrival of the wise men at the crib. The story begins in Jerusalem where King Herod and those around him are frightened and confused having heard that a star has signalled the birth of a new "King of the Jews".

Thirty years later, the chief priests and scribes of Jerusalem are angered and confused by the presence of Jesus who challenges their authority and attracts large numbers of followers.

And later, the title "King of the Jews", sincerely given by the wise men, is used by soldiers to taunt Jesus during his trials: "Hail, King of the Jews".

Herod and the chief priests and scribes of his time use Gentiles for their own ends – they ask the wise men to find the child and then pass the information back to Jerusalem. The chief priests and scribes of later years use Gentiles again; the power of the Roman authorities, to secure the execution of Jesus.

At both times, deceit, secrecy and stealth are used against the One who brings light and truth into the world.

There are also noticeable contrasts. At his birth, we have light in the night sky, the worship of a child, the coming of a shepherd for the people of Israel and rejoicing in this new birth. At his death they see darkness in daytime, mockery of the man, a stricken shepherd and scattered sheep, mourning and grief.

These contrasts in the account of Jesus' life speak to us of our own experiences. The way that we relate to each other is often shaped by what has happened in our past, and that past will be full of contrasts; highs and lows which we may remember or not but will have shaped the person that we are.

These experiences remain with us throughout our lives, and as we grow older and perhaps become more self-aware, then we can see how they have shaped us.

For Christians, this time of the year, Epiphany, is the celebration of the showing to us of God in the shape of a baby. God, in Jesus, has entered into this human life with all its highs and lows, confusions and contradictions.

Having entered this human life, Jesus has to experience all that humans experience. He gave love and received love, he suffered bereavement and rejection, betrayal and cruelty.

At the end of it all, though, it is love that has the final word as Jesus is raised from the dead.

Of course, we are able to say this in the light of what the Church teaches us, but it is a different matter to own that belief for ourselves, and early in the New year, we can reflect upon how our faith impacts upon the life that we lead. Just as the Magi went on a journey, so we begin, once again at Epiphany, a journey with Christ.

All of the people in the Christmas story had to make a decision to believe for themselves. 2000 years ago, the shepherds and the wise men had only their hunches to follow. Were those really angels singing? How did they know? Was it worth taking all of that time out to follow a star—and what would they have thought when they reached their destination?

As we read of the people who play a part in the unfolding drama of Jesus' life, we see in them one thing in common, they responded in faith, and with faith—

What stirred them to do so? What stirred them to jump to this new, strange Gospel of confessing and forgiving sin, to follow a baby born in a stable whose teachings got him hung on a cross?

The Magi followed the star because they felt drawn to believe in something that they wished were true, and all of us who call ourselves Christians are drawn to believe in a Gospel which we long to be true—but we cannot know finally, not that is, until the day when we face our Saviour ourselves.

This is the risk of faith, the risk which was taken by Mary, Joseph, the shepherds, the wise men and indeed by every Christian that has ever lived, and hoped in salvation.

One day we will know, but until then we live in the hope of salvation, and for those who did encounter Jesus, that hope changed the course of their lives in a radical way, and for each of us that hope can shape our life and the way that we live it.

As the New Year begins, we have the chance to reflect upon the ways in which God gives to us, and the way in which we receive from him. May we do so with wisdom, humility and grace.

Amen

Our prayers

We pray for all God's people, that at every stage of life we may respond to God's call to his service, and use to the full the gifts that he has bestowed upon us.

We pray for those setting out on life, that they may explore the faith and the gifts God has given them, and come to know the risen life of Christ.

We pray for those in the fullness of life, that they may show the love of Christ, serving him daily, and, those about them, in his name and for his sake.

We pray for those in later life, that they may offer to God their experience of life, its pleasures and its pain, and through him, face the future with confidence and with hope.

We pray for all in need, those who feel empty and devoid of gifts, with nothing to give and unable to receive. May they meet God in their nothingness, and discover his offering of love.

Final prayer

Father, we rejoice that you have given each one of us grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. We offer those gifts to you, so that we may use them in love for one another, and in the service of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.