

Sunday 6th January 2025

The Epiphany

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2.1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

² In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, ² 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.’ ³ When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵ They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet:

⁶ “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.”

⁷ Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. ⁸ 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.’ ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy. ¹¹ 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. ¹² And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Other Readings: Isaiah 60.1-6 Psalm 72.[1-9]10-15 Ephesians 3.1-12

Homily

Strange presents for a baby – particularly for one born in a stable, as we often portray it.

Ordinary babies get teddies. Jesus get gold – a present for a king.

Ordinary babies get rattles, one of the way they communicate as they get a little older, before they’re able to speak. Jesus gets incense – used for worship, burned in the temple, sign of the people’s prayers rising to God.

Ordinary babies get talc, used to help them keep dry, comfortable, clean. Jesus gets myrrh – an ointment poured over bodies to prepare them for death.

Strange presents for a baby – but for one who Mark says in his gospel ‘came to give his life as a ransom for many’ (Mark 10:45) Who came to fulfil all that we remember in the communion service? Who came to deal, by his death, by his sacrifice, with that problem of our sin that keeps each of us separated from the God who longs for each of us to start this year knowing his love, knowing his goodness, knowing his walking with us, for whatever the year brings.

There is an ancient folk tale that goes like this

A king had an only son. He loved him very much.

When the prince’s birthday came, the king invited everyone in the kingdom to a huge and magnificent party.

‘You are all welcome to the feast’ he proclaimed. ‘To be allowed in you simply have to bring a present for the prince. It must be a container made of gold or silver.’

The people were disappointed to learn that they had to bring a gift made of precious metal. How could they afford such riches? And so they worked out a way around the problem. They made jugs, mugs, goblets and platters of gold and silver. But none of them was any bigger than a container you would find in a doll’s house. All of them except one person There was a girl who loved the prince so much that she sold everything she had so that she could buy a huge golden plate – and that is what she took to the party.

The day arrived. All of the guests stood in the castle court-yard waiting for the start of the feast. The king and the prince came out on the balcony. The king smiled: ‘Thank you my people. I am grateful to you for showing how much you love my son. I shall reward you. When I give the signal, the doors of my treasure house will be thrown open. You are free to enter and fill your container with gold, silver and jewels – whatever you wish. You may take as much as you can carry away in your container.

Suddenly the young girl felt thousands of eyes staring at her.

The question for us this morning is not God’s ability to bless, to do what he promises. The question is what size container are we coming to him with, as we enter into the new year? One which is small and costs us nothing, or one which costs us everything we have – but is ready to receive all that he wants to give.

One of our great Carols puts it like this

*What can I give him, poor as I am,
if I were a shepherd I would bring a lamb,
if I were a wise man I would do my part,
yet what I can, I give him, give my heart*

In one sense we’ve got nothing to give to God – he’s already got everything he needs! In another sense, what he wants is everything we have!

Conversation Questions

1. What size of container do we come to him with, as we enter this new year with him?

2. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you?
What is it?
3. What will you do this week in your Monday-to-Saturday ministry in response to what you have heard today? #everydayfaith

Prayer

Spend some time in prayer, responding to what you have heard today and listening to what God might be saying to you.

Collect of the day

*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;
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

(or)

*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.*

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