

## Rev'd Jean's Sermon – Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> January 2023

### The Feast of the Epiphany

#### Readings:

**Ephesians 3: 1-12**

**Matthew 2: 1-12**

Well, here we are. 7 days into 2024. A new year. We gather today on the wonderful Solemnity of the Epiphany. What does that mean for us all?

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of December I stood here and shared with you my enjoyment of looking at the varying Christmas lights in gardens on my way down to Darton. I came down on Tuesday of this week to find most of them gone, tidied away.

I have also heard more than once "I'm glad it's over". What is over? I ask us all those questions. I want to say. This story is never over, it is a continuing and ever renewing story. It begins again and again for us all.

Epiphany means showing, a moment of revelation, realization, manifestation which means shining, a manifesto is also a pointer usually to some plans for the way ahead in all areas of business and our lives. As we recall this event/story part of the Nativity it is relevant and indeed can be adapted to our own journeys and lives. As humanity we are born with a free will and ability to choose!! Whether or not we like the story of the Magi, the Wise men, Astrologers, kings, they follow Gods word and call to us all. This reading is given to us at the beginning of a new year,

Many people make resolutions, maybe it is time for us to reflect once again on this story, this is one of the world's greatest stories, it is full of drama, expectancy, radiance, mystery and beauty.

We remembered the slaughter of the Holy Innocents last week and we know that in Bethlehem at this time several innocent young males were slaughtered, because a jealous and evil king Herod was terrified of losing his power over others. So, what is it that makes this child Jesus so special?

The account of the visit of the Wise Men is asking us to remember again that this child of God is something of unsurpassable significance to humanity right now, something that can transform the darkness of humanity's failings and darkneses into light and hope. Let us then immerse ourselves in this story once again, watching those who are part of it and learning from what they do and speak.

The story of the magi is a beautiful example of obedience and commitment. They were most probably from the East from Persia, modern day Iran. They were men of knowledge and used to watching the sky and the study of stars. It was their belief that when someone important was born their birth was accompanied by a new star, so they saw this as a wonderful sign and a significance of hope for all people, they knew they had to find where this was to lead them, they chose to follow this star and to embark on a long and arduous journey, not without its difficulties, as they had to work out the truth of the encounter with Herod, who was still determined to be rid of this child. So, the star familiar to these men called them on.

God often uses things most familiar in our lives and the lives of the church and others to call us on to be fully engaged in the journey to seek him out and hear afresh the calling to us in our ordinary lives.

Let us pause briefly through this day to ponder what is God calling us to, where is our star needing us to go and to be attentive to his love and calling to us. How do we respond to listening and to serve better in 2024. We have this gift of light we must share that with others. How? There are many travelling through dark days our common calling as Christians is to be a light to show care, concern and love.

The Wise Men we are told presented the child with amazing gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh. These gifts were a pointer to Jesus's life.

These gifts symbolically represent the aspects of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Gold for a King, frankincense for a life of prayer, and myrrh for anointing preparation for death, pointing to the cross. Also representing peace, salvation,

and eternal life. This is a further example that God often uses things that are a familiar part of our daily lives to send us forth and to let us know of his closeness and calling, Remember the call of Jesus to the fishermen that they could use their daily catching of fish to catch people for God.

We in our own lives can take confidence in the Mission and Ministry that God calls us to. Are we listening, are we making a response? To be willing to serve.

The world we live in tries to satisfy and satiate us through constant stimulation and excitement, technology and social media tells us of things we need to satisfy our longings. It further constantly shows us despair and increasing violence and tragedies that people face daily. It begins to take a toll on our response to our spiritual calling. So how do we deal with some of this. The need for unity and equality continues to paralyze the human family and indeed the church.

We listen to the powerful words of St Paul to the community in Ephesus, he wants us to hear his prayer for all for the church to be open to receive the power and mystery of accepting Jesus, that Gods plan is has always been for unity of all people irrespective of race, gender and nation. He tells us that this is what had been revealed to him and empowered him to preach a Gospel of love, our mission to make known Jesus and his Spirit, whether we are clergy, congregation, tribes, communities, genders. We are to preach together the message of reconciliation to be participants in the message of peace, to allow ourselves to be moved to prayer through God's strength and the Holy Spirit. Paul further points us to the hope of global harmony and the healing of disconnections and chaos.

The Christmas Season is a time to reflect on the past year and to look forward to new beginnings in 2024. The birth of Christ is seen as a holiday a time of celebration, a reminder of goodwill.

Let us then ask ourselves where the stars in our life are pointing us to are we able to follow, do we have the courage and the trust as the Magi did, coming to him from whatever route then to present the very best of our gifts however simple, if they come from the heart.

So let us relate this journey to our lives and take a step back to make sure that we can follow the path we have been called to.

Can I suggest this is not a story that needs to be put away, to be put back in the box, but keeping it out at the forefront of our journey. So, take a further look today at the Nativity. Walk past it here in church and see these visitors that have called to us today and see the light shining in a different way.