

Tuesday 6th January 2026

Epiphany

Gospel Reading

Matthew 2.1-12

The Visit of the Wise Men

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.

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

Homily

When we tell the Nativity Story in church, we often tell it in three parts – the birth of Jesus, the arrival of the shepherds, and the visit of the Wise Men, or Magi. This third part of the story is today, the feast of the Epiphany.

The season from Christmas to Candlemas is all about revelation: things being revealed to us about God through the person of Jesus Christ.

Christmas, being the festival of the Incarnation, is about God revealing himself to the world, the Word made flesh, Emmanuel, God-with-us.

Candlemas tells the story of Mary and Joseph taking Jesus to the Temple, and Simeon proclaiming Jesus to be the light to enlighten the nations. God reveals himself as the light that shines in the darkness of our world.

The Epiphany holds a different revelation. This is the first time that God, in Jesus, is revealed to peoples beyond Israel. In today's part of the Christmas story, Jesus is revealed to the Magi, the Wise Men, by the guiding light of a star in the night sky.

The Gospel tells us that after Jesus was born in Bethlehem, 'wise men from the east' came to King Herod to ask about the baby. They ask Herod '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.'

They come from lands afar, watching for the signs of great things to come, and when they see that sign, they come to pay homage to this child, born to be a king.

God called to them, by a sign they would recognise, and they responded.

By this sign, God also reveals himself to King Herod, and in complete contrast to the Wise Men who come to worship the child, Herod is afraid. Herod is threatened by God's revelation of himself.

This shouldn't be a surprise: when God speaks to the world, he is often rebuking humankind for turning from the ways of justice, mercy and peace. He challenges the status quo, raises up the lowly, and casts the mighty from their thrones.

It's no wonder that Herod is afraid of God's revelation, for God is a threat to all those who thrive on injustice, oppression, misery and violence.

While Herod sits on his throne fearing this King of the Jews, the Wise Men continue on their journey. They find Jesus, kneel before him and pay him homage. They present to him gifts: gold for Jesus' royalty, incense for his divinity, and myrrh foretelling his death.

Notice the way these people respond to God's revelation of his love, power and presence. Herod responds with fear, and we know from the Gospels that he also responds with violence – ordering the death of the Holy Innocents in case one of them might be the king foretold.

The Wise Men respond with worship and the offering of precious gifts. Might we too respond like them, with worship and with our own precious gifts?

Think of those beautiful words from the Christmas carol 'In the Bleak Midwinter' –

*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.*

Our precious gift is ourselves. We give our hearts and our lives, all that we are and all that we have, in the service of God. God responds to that gift by transforming our lives with his love, and like the Magi, making us a sign and instrument by which others can hear the Good News for themselves.

Yet before all of this, we must bring the gift of our worship. The Wise Men came and knelt before the child Jesus; so too we must come before God with our prayers and our praises, our thanksgiving and our love. We do not come to worship for worship's sake. We are not simply 'going through the motions.' We come to worship because we love God, who loved the world so much that he gave us his only Son, that we might have eternal life.

At the beginning of each new year, we traditionally make 'New Year's Resolutions.' Today, might we make a resolution for God? To listen to God's call and respond, bearing only the precious gift of ourselves, given in worship and service of God and his kingdom.

Amen.

Conversation Questions

1. Have you made any 'New Year's Resolutions' about life and faith this year?
2. What are the 'precious gifts' that you offer to God?
3. What is your experience of worship like? Is it our best offering to God?
4. Is there anything else from the passage not already discussed that speaks to you? What is it?
5. 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.*

Common Worship: Services and Prayers for the Church of England, material from which is incorporated in this service paper, is copyright © The Archbishops' Council, 2000. Scripture passage from the New Revised Standard Version (Anglicised) copyright © 1989, 1995 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.