

2016-01-03 Sue Diggory
Matthew 2: 1 – 12

The Feast of Epiphany

PRAY

**Twinkle twinkle little star how I wonder what you are,
Up above the sky so high, like a diamond in the sky**

A childish rhyme that I expect we have all sung or had sung to us at some time in our lives!

Today we celebrate the feast of Epiphany. In the Western church the feast of Epiphany became the time to focus on just one part of the story of Christ's birth; the visit by the far travelled magi, those mysterious visitors who journeyed from the east with even stranger gifts for the infant Jesus; those mysterious visitors who followed the star!

And the season concludes with the presentation of Christ in the Temple when Anna and old Simeon recognise him as the one who is, to quote the familiar words of the Nunc Dimittis *to be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel!* The one who had come to bring all into God's favour; both Jew and Gentile, both believer and unbeliever; and we will return to that thought later.

Who saw the star first and how did they react – did they rush of to tell the other magi or did they just stand there in amazement and wonder at having at long last seen what they had been searching for in night sky.

So what can we learn from this familiar story that will help us in our own Christian journey as we travel into 2016 and all that God's has in store for here both as individuals and as the family of Holy Trinity.

What lessons can we take from visit of the Magi to the infant Jesus?

The Wise Men were searching ... for a sign

We observed his star at its rising

We don't know much about them – they came from the East, probably from Persia, modern day Iraq, and they were astrologers, men who studied the stars and they knew that something special was going to happen, they knew that they needed to persevere and keep searching. They knew the sign in the sky that they were expecting would lead

them to a king. How long had they searched the night sky waiting and watching until finally they saw what they were looking for with the conjunction of Jupiter the royal planet and Saturn the planet which for many represented the Jews?

Patience and perseverance, searching and waiting to see where God is leading, where does God want to lead us this year I wonder, as we prepare to start a new chapter here in the life of Holy Trinity.

The Wise Men were ready ... to journey

Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem

Once they saw the sign they knew it was time to set out on their journey, a journey to find the king, the king that the star would lead them to. We don't know how many people journeyed, but we do know it would have taken a long time. From Persia, Babylonia, where the Wise Men are supposed to have come from, to Jerusalem was a journey of over 900 miles, via the ancient trade route along the Fertile Crescent. Such a distance may have taken any time between three and twelve months by camel. Besides the time of travel, there were probably many weeks of preparation. The Wise Men would have needed to prepare carefully and it is unlikely that they would have reached Jerusalem till a year or more had elapsed from the time of the appearance of the star.

Being ready to go, being ready to follow, not knowing the way, not knowing the destination, just being ready to follow in God's footsteps, how willing I wonder are we to do that as we journey into 2016.

The Wise Men were prepared ... to trust

We observed his star

It's easy for us to forget that they didn't know where they were going, they didn't know how long the journey would take, they had to put their trust in the sign they had seen in the sky and trust that it would take them where they wanted to go ... that it would take them to the king, the king born to be king of the Jews. I wonder how they felt as they approached Jerusalem, the capital city, the place where the King's palace was only to find that the obvious place was not the place that God had chosen for his son to be born.

Trust can be such a hard thing to do – especially when we don't know exactly where we are going or exactly what will be asked of us. So often God calls us to trust him in the less than obvious, because his ways are not our ways, are we willing to trust him when things don't seem to make sense as we journey into 2016.

The Wise Men were prepared ... to keep going

When they had heard the king, they set out, and there ahead of them went the star.

They still needed to journey on, they still needed to keep searching ... would we have given up at this point and wondered if we had got it wrong or worse still that the star been a false sign. Would we have gone home or would we like the Wise Men have kept been prepared to keep on searching until they found what they were looking for, even though it meant seeing Herod, the king who wanted to kill the infant king.

Keeping going again this can be so hard, especially when things seem to be going nowhere, when we don't seem to be making any progress, or worse still when obstacles seem to litter our pathway. Keeping going and being always ready to respond to God - that can be a hard call on our lives. How willing are we just to 'keep going' as we journey into 2016.

The Wise Men were ready ... to worship

And they knelt down and paid him homage. The opening their treasure chests they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Finally they arrived at the end of their journey; the star had stopped; at long last they were able to bow before the king they had travelled so many hundreds of miles to see, but they were not at a palace the royal home of an earthly king, but at the humble home of a young mother and her child; they were at the home of the infant Jesus; they had arrived in God's presence and we are told they bowed down and worshipped, handed over their treasures and then returned home.

Treasures that were appropriate for a king, and perhaps even more appropriate than they had realised as they bowed before not just a king, not just an earthly king of the Jews but the divine king of heaven, the saviour of the world, the one begotten and not made the one who was and is God incarnate, Emmanuel, God with us. And then they left and that is the last we hear of them.

Being in God's presence makes a difference, even if when we don't recognise him; the wise men were changed and returned by another route which kept the whereabouts of the infant Jesus safe; but as we know the manifestation of the Christ child to the wise men is just the beginning, the beginning of our understanding of who he really is – the light to lighten the gentiles as well as well as the glory of Israel and for us as we continue our journey with God into 2016 we need to face the challenge that we are being called to journey with and follow the one who has come to bring all into God's favour; both Jew and Gentile, both believer and unbeliever; whoever they may be, and that for us can make the journey hard because he chooses our companions and not us as we travel with him through 2016.