

Sunday 5th January 2025; Epiphany - Benefice HC
Oswaldkirk

Happy New Year! When you think about it, celebrating Epiphany is a great way to begin a new year, because this story is about people going on a journey to find Jesus, which is a great metaphor for all people of faith. We are all on a journey to find him, personally and together.

We are reminded today of the journey of the Magi who travelled a long distance following the star to Bethlehem. So, who were they? The Magi are popularly referred to as *wise men* and *kings*. The word *magi* is the plural of Latin *magus*, borrowed from Greek. The Greek *magos* itself is derived from Old Persian referring to the priests of Zoroastrianism, which is one of the oldest religions in the world. Within this tradition, priests paid particular attention to the stars and gained an international reputation for astrology, which was at that time highly regarded as a science. Their religious practices and astrological abilities later caused derivatives of the term *Magi* to be applied to the occult in general from which we derive the word *magic*.

Their story particularly fascinates me as my early spiritual journey took in astronomy, astrology and eastern faiths. And if like me some of you might follow the Star Wars films, the Magi are also hinted at in the form of the Jedi knights!

Back to our Gospel and the account of these Magi finding Jesus with his mother Mary. We are told they immediately kneel and pay him homage. Their long journey had reached its conclusion, because they had travelled all this way for one reason, and one reason only: to worship the newborn King of the Jews. They didn't come with any kind of agenda; they weren't looking for the answer to the meaning of life, or anything like that or trying to win favour with the king early in his reign. They simply came

to pay homage to him, and to offer him gifts. It's a beautiful description of worship, which we too should emulate. We too should come without any kind of agenda, but simply to worship Jesus and to offer him gifts. The magi presented Jesus with gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Gold, first, is a gift fit for a *king*. Jesus is born King of the Jews, and so is offered the gift of gold. Frankincense is a gift appropriate for a *priest*. It was often used in Temple worship and sacrifices, and was given to Jesus to remind us all that he is a priest, our high priest who opens the gates of Heaven itself, so that we can worship His Father through Him. Finally, myrrh is the *prophetic* gift, reminding us that Jesus will one day die for the sins of the world. Myrrh was used in ancient times to prepare the dead for burial, and it was used for Jesus after his death. The magi present Jesus with these gifts that show him to be a prophet, a priest, and a king, a king who would die for our sins, and to put an end to eternal death.

We are told the magi returned home by another road, because they were warned not to return to Herod. But perhaps their returning home by another road also has a symbolic significance. The magi, after all, are forever changed by their encounter with the Christ child. They will never be the same and would return home different people, and so it is only fitting that they go by new road, on a new spiritual journey for life. This is why we call today, Epiphany.

Epiphany means a manifestation, a sudden realisation or perception of the essential nature and purpose of being, it is a discovery, a disclosure. The Magi experienced all these things at the end of their journey and the beginning of their new one. What about us? When we encounter Christ, are our lives changed? When that happens, young or old, do we go back home with a whole new identity and mission, on a new journey as children of God; citizens of another kingdom, where our journey will forever take us

by another road. our sins forgiven, our souls nurtured with the word and sacrament, our priorities re-arranged and a peace in our hearts that will not be taken away.

It is a new year, and what a blessing it is to begin this new year together. None of us knows what this year holds for us, or for our world, but we don't have to, because we know that wherever this year takes us, Jesus will be with us on the journey. We have found him. We have worshiped him, and now we travel on our journey, by new and unexpected roads, but always with our Emmanuel alongside us.

As we travel through this new year together, may the one who created the stars, and gave us his only son, bless us and keep us; may the Lord's face shine on us with grace and mercy; may the Lord look upon us with favour, and give us peace. Thanks be to God. Amen.