

Sunday 4th January 2026. Christmas 2 – Epiphany. BCP
Benefice Holy Communion, Stonegrave.

Last Sunday on Holy Innocents, I reflected on the harrowing story of the retribution of Herod on the baby boys in Bethlehem and the suffering of the vulnerable and the innocent. Today however, we have a very different theme, the Epiphany.

The Epiphany of Our Lord is properly celebrated on January 6th, but it can be celebrated on the second Sunday of Christmas, which is what we are doing this morning. Epiphany literally means ‘manifestation’ or ‘revelation’ and our Gospel today is about the Magi going on a journey or a pilgrimage to see Jesus, which is a great metaphor for all people of faith. The notion of pilgrimage is becoming popular again. It is generally understood to involve a physical journey, but pilgrimage doesn’t have to involve travel – it can be an inner journey too, a journey of the heart, soul and mind, a journey of transformation and understanding. We had an introduction to this theme during the Advent course where we looked at spiritual intelligence. As usual the new year will begin with me meeting a new group of students starting their journey to confirmation later in the year. Epiphany then is this journey of searching to find something made manifest, something revealed. We are all on this journey, together and that coming together, will be my aim during this coming year for us as a Benefice and as a community.

Scripture offers us many important journey examples too. From Abraham being told to go to the land that God will show him, to the Israelites traveling through the wilderness on their way to the promised land, to Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem before the birth of their son, to Jesus, returning to heaven to prepare a place for us, and reminding us that he is the way, and the truth, and the

life. Like the magi before us, we journey to find and worship the Saviour, who is Christ the Lord.

The magi were astronomers and were first led by a star which tells us that God starts His journey with people where they are. Because the magi were people who studied the stars, God sent them a new star to follow and to find Jesus. God can use almost any event in life, good or bad, to set us on our way, in search of our Saviour. But once we are on the way, we need help. We need God's word, each other. We need the Holy Spirit working through us and through the Word and prayer to lead the way on our journey, wherever we are lead.

We are told the magi returned home by another road, because they were warned not to return to Herod but more significantly, they had been forever changed by their encounter with the Christ child. They will never be the same and they return home different people, and so it is only fitting that they go by another road. This was their Epiphany experience, revealed and made manifest to them.

An Epiphany in the biblical context refers to moments of sudden revelation and divine presence, enriching spiritual connection with God. So, what about us? When we encounter Christ, are our lives forever changed? Young or old, do we go home by a new road with a whole new identity and mission as children of God? Is it made manifest to us that we are now citizens of another kingdom, of heaven itself, and our journey will forever take us by another road. Every time we come to church do we look to continue to be changed, sins forgiven, our souls nurtured with the word and sacrament, and our priorities re-arranged? If that is why we are here we will be changed whenever we worship and pray here in the house of the Lord just as the magi were changed when they encountered the Christ child.

It is a new year, and what a blessing it is to begin this new year together here in this beautiful ancient place at Stonegrave. Truthfully, 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 and worshiped him and now we travel on our way, by new and unexpected roads, but always with Emmanuel alongside us.

Thanks be to God. Amen.