**Morning Praise @ Home 2nd January 2022 Epiphany**

**What are you searching for?**



**Opening prayer based on Matthew 2**

O Holy Father, who gave guidance to the wise men

until they bowed in worship before our Saviour,

lead us to an awareness of your presence

and to bow in adoration before Christ our Lord,

who is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,

one God now and forever. **Amen**

**Confession** Let us admit to God the sin which always confronts us.

**Lord God, we have sinned against you; we have done evil in your sight. We are sorry and**

**repent.** **Have mercy on us according to your love. Wash away our wrongdoing and cleanse us**

**from our sin.** **Renew a right spirit within us** **and restore us to the joy of your salvation,** **through**

**Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen** cf Psalm 51

**Absolution** May the Father of all mercies cleanse us from our sins, and restore us in his image

to the praise and glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord.  **Amen.**

### Bible Readings Isaiah 60:1 – 6 Matthew 2:1 – 12

**Reflection from John**

Most of life is made up of ordinary moments. You wake up, you head out to work, you must deal with people throughout the day, and no ordinary day would be complete without having to solve a problem or two. Yet, sometimes extraordinary events can break into those ordinary moments.

In today’s reading the religious leaders were going about their various religious duties, probably at the temple, when King Herod summoned them to inquire about where the Messiah was to be born. This is an extraordinary event, because you couldn’t call Herod a religious man; he normally would have no interest in the Jewish beliefs, and so for him to ask that question makes it more than just an ordinary moment.

So that question should have aroused in those religious leaders more than just a Scriptural response to Herod’s question. It should have aroused a level of curiosity to go seek information in Bethlehem if indeed the Christ child was born. After all, He was the Jews long awaited Saviour. But they didn’t leave Jerusalem and travel the five point two (5.2) miles to Bethlehem.

Why not? I’d say it was indifference. The religious leaders showed a lack of concern for the possibility that the Messiah has been born, the Messiah who their prophets prophesied about for centuries. What the Gospel **doesn’t** say is:

“After leaving Herod, the religious leaders went to Bethlehem in search of the Christ child”.

What the absence of that statement tells me is that they most likely went back to the Temple to do their religious activities. And that shouts out that they felt self-sufficient rather than God dependent. Those religious leaders felt everything was going fine without Jesus in their lives and there was no need to let Him in. They had everything under control. They were self-sufficient. And I am afraid that is how a lot of people in this New Year feel.

At this first Christmas, the religious leaders did not openly oppose the Christ child, they just ignored Him.

Sadly, the same thing happened this Christmas in homes all across this country. People ignored Christ and had their holiday celebration without Him.

But the Wise Men weren’t indifferent. The wise men have always had enormous appeal. Everything about them has been elaborated in poetry and story. They’ve become kings; they’ve been depicted as representing youth, maturity and old age; they’ve been given the features of different races; they’ve even been named. They function as our representatives; all of us Gentiles, who weren’t actually there. That’s the connection that runs through the Lectionary passages set for today, and form the theme for this morning. It’s the theme of God’s great self-revelation to the world.

In Isaiah, the scene is in darkness. The figure might be asleep, or might be prostrate with grief. Suddenly an incandescent light shines, illuminating the central figure and emphasizing the darkness all around. Behind the figure, the light gathers, brighter and brighter, forming into a clear, majestic shape, made of brilliance.

Gradually other shapes come on to the stage, drawn by the light, shuffling out of the darkness. The whole stage erupts into a party, as the light spreads further and further. The one who was alone and in darkness is now surrounded by light and laughter. Bit by bit, through the happy sounds, the central character’s voice is heard, singing a hymn. Gradually other voices pick it up, until the whole stage coalesces into one song, a song of praise to the Light.

This is how Isaiah sees God’s revelation. It’s to be a time of vindication for his people, but in their triumph they are generous. They’re thrilled not only by the wealth and honour that recognition brings, but also by the fact that the nations can now share in their worship of God. The culmination of today’s passage is the picture of community united to ‘proclaim the praise of the Lord’. The point of God’s epiphany is that everyone should be drawn to him.

Huge claims are made for Paul - and, by implication, for all Christians - in the passage in Ephesians where it is said that the ‘mystery’ of God’s inclusive call waits upon Paul’s conversion and commission. To Paul and, it is rather grudgingly admitted, to ‘the holy apostles and prophets’, is entrusted the revelation that all can share in the gospel. The enormity of this claim is clear - God’s original plan for his whole creation, thus far hidden, is now entrusted to the Church. The ‘rulers and authorities in the heavenly places’, who may have felt that they had rights over the Gentiles at least, are shown a community drawn from all races and owing allegiance only to God. Perhaps the church you attend Sunday by Sunday does not always remind you of ‘the wisdom of God in its rich variety’, but it should. But again, as with the passage in Isaiah, the purpose of this self-gift of God to his people is not to elevate believers above others, but to enable worship. We can now approach God, knowing that we are called, loved, wanted.

What strange messengers God chooses for his gospel -the dark, mourning figure in Isaiah; the difficult, touchy apostle Paul, whose mission often lands him in prison; the infantile, squabbling Christian Church.

And that brings us full circle to the wise men, again.

If you actually read the passage in Matthew, trying to forget the preconceptions you bring to it, you will see that they are very odd figures. We don’t know where they come from, just that it is ‘the East’. We don’t know how many of them there are, just how many presents they bring. We don’t know their status, though they do have the confidence to call at Herod’s palace. What they saw, in the end, cannot have been what they were expecting. They were tracking a king, so they looked for him in a palace, and brought presents that must have looked singularly out of place to Mary and the child Jesus. Not for them the direct visitation of the angels, with clear instructions on how to find the baby - that is reserved for the shepherds. The wise men follow the bright, enigmatic star, using their intelligence to calculate its path, making assumptions in their visit to Herod - and with what fatal consequences.

So the real story of the wise men seems to be about the challenge of God’s coming. God’s kingship is not what you might expect, and his revelation is blindingly unpredictable. But at least the wise men do recognize their journey’s end when they see it. We’re told that they are ‘overwhelmed with joy’. They leave their strange presents and go home satisfied. Let us hope that in that, at least, they are our representatives.

**Amen**

**Affirmation of faith**

Do you believe and trust in God the Father, source of all being and life, the one for whom we exist?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Son, who took our human nature, died for us and rose again?

**We believe and trust in him.**

Do you believe and trust in God the Holy Spirit, who gives life to the people of God and makes Christ

known in the world? **We believe and trust in him. This is the faith of the Church.**

**This is our faith. We believe and trust in one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.**

**Prayers of intercession led by Tony**

Let us worship the Saviour with joy and make our prayer to our heavenly Father.

The magi came from the east to worship your Son:

Father, grant to Christians everywhere the spirit of adoration so that they may fully bless your holy name.

Lord of glory, **hear our prayer.**

The infant Christ received gifts of gold, incense and myrrh:

Father, accept the offering of our hearts and minds at the beginning of this year so that we will dedicate all that we have to you.

Lord of glory, **hear our prayer.**

The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ: Father, grant an abundance of peace to your world. We pray especially for all who are suffering because of hatred and oppression.

Lord of glory, **hear our prayer.**

The Holy Family lived in exile and in the shadow of death:

Father, look in mercy on all who are poor and powerless, and all who suffer because of selfish greed for money, fame or power. Help us to remember the work of charities such as The Foodbank and Charles Thompson Mission

Lord of glory, **hear our prayer.**

Your Son shared the life of his home and family at Nazareth:

Father, protect in your love our neighbours, our families and this community of which we are a part here in Burton, Puddington and all areas of the Wirral.

Lord of glory, **hear our prayer.**

Father, we rejoice in our fellowship with the shepherds, the angels, the magi, the Virgin Mary and Joseph.

In your unfailing love for us and for all people, hear and answer our prayers through your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

**The Lord’s Prayer** As our Saviour taught us, so we pray

***Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name, Thy kingdom come,******Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen***

**Closing prayer**

God give you grace to become the people He has called you to be,

that you may live and work to his praise and glory,

and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit

be with us and remain with us always. **Amen.**

Go in peace to love and serve the Lord. **In the name of Christ. Amen**