

Epiphany, St Michael's 9.30am 02 01 22

Come thou long expected Jesus, come to set thy people free.
Words of hope and expectation we sang in Advent as we heard the words of John the Baptist heralding the coming of the new age and looked forward to Christmas and celebrating the incarnation of our Lord. The Israelites had long looked forward in hope for the coming of Messiah the one who would set God's people free.

Yesterday saw the beginning of a new year which is for many usually a time for looking forward in hope to a better future but this year we do so at a time when the pandemic which we have lived through over the past twenty-two months shows vastly increased numbers and yet again the potential to overwhelm the NHS.

In the midst of this, today we celebrate the Feast of the Epiphany, when Christians focus on who this baby lying in the manger, really is. It's the time when our thoughts and worship are directed towards the recognition that the human

Jesus is also divine. He is The Word made flesh. At a specific moment in time the eternal creator of all things became one with his creation. Emmanuel - God with us in all the pain and brokenness of this world.

I'm not particularly good at solving cryptic clues but I do enjoy doing coded cross words. One day the first clue was M blank double blank H. With out finding this word I could not get any further with the crossword, I was completely stuck. When I eventually worked out that the word was myrrh the rest of puzzle fell into place. It was so obvious I just couldn't understand how I had failed to see it.

Some years ago, the front page of the Church times had a picture drawn by a modern artist. I remember failing to see in its lines the face of Christ even when it was pointed out to me. After some days of looking at it and studying it I finally made out the features and the face became visible to me. It was now so apparent to me that this was a drawing of a face that I could not understand how I had failed to see it and I could not look at it and not see the face.

Our understanding is determined by what we know and the thing we know about best is being human. In the incarnation God was revealed to us in terms we could understand.

Old Simeon as he took the baby Jesus into his arms put it
this way

“My eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared in the sight of every people;
A light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.”

The story of the wise men tells of the first Gentiles to seek and find the Christ child and worship at his feet. The Magi looked in the obvious place for a great king, a grand palace, they were led to a humble abode and found a helpless infant not sitting on a throne but on his mother's knee. They recognised in the child the one they had travelled far in search of, the one they had longed to see. At the culmination of their journey of hope they discovered what they were looking for and fell down and worshiped Him.

The Bishop of Ravenna nearly 1600 years ago said this, “Today the Magi gaze in deep wonder at what they see, heaven on earth, earth in heaven, humankind in God, God in human flesh, one whom the universe cannot contain enclosed in a tiny body. As they look they do not question, as their symbolic gifts bear witness: incense for God, Gold for King, myrrh for the one who is to die.”

At his mother’s knee, Christ is recognised and acclaimed by Gentile sages to be the true king, the perfect High priest and the Saviour of all humankind.

Matthew’s account of the wise men sets out plainly for his readers the belief and worship of those who knelt in homage at their recognition of the Christ child.

At the end of his time on earth, on the third day new life burst forth from the garden tomb. In that moment as Mary looked for the dead Jesus, she recognised the risen Christ.

Epiphany is about recognition, it is about seeing something which has been hidden, and recognising it for what it is.

The visitation of the Magi is about seeing who Jesus really is.

They began by looking in the palace the obvious place to find a king, they found the infant Christ in a place they least expected, yet when they found him they recognised him and fell down and worshiped Him.

The wise men who came from the east were gentiles and that is important for us because so are we. They followed a star faithfully and with perseverance and hope until they found and worshiped the King of Kings.

Their journey was at the worst time of the year, it was long and hard, but they did not delay or make excuses. When they did not find him where they anticipated they did not turn round and go home they went on in hope and expectancy until they did.

We too are to make the journey to find and to recognise Him, so that we too may kneel at his feet and bring all we have to

offer, our obedience, our worship, our hopes and our fears and our prayers for healing and forgiveness.

We are told that after they had given their gifts the wise men departed but they went back another way. Like them we must rise from worship and go out into the world. But, like the wise men, we too must go by another way for once we have experienced our moment of epiphany things will never be the same again, for Christ, who brought hope to the hopeless, and came to be a light to lighten the gentiles leads us, and we must follow Him in faith and hope and love.