

family but for all who are involved in their experience at the time and now! God's provision makes the implausible plausible. However tradition embellishes the Biblical account ~ the account resonates with us and what we find believable and amazing we can share! Paul writing to the Ephesians talks about becoming a servant of the Gospel ~ prepared to share the mystery of God's love!

Isaiah had no doubt that God was going to provide for His people ~ not just the tribes of Israel but all His people of every race and creed who are enabled to recognise His provision through the power of the Spirit. Isaiah tells us to lift up our eyes and look about us". When you and I see for ourselves we are to be counted as those who are told to "Arise, shine, for your light has come" we are told that "our hearts will throb with joy" and right at the end of Isaiah's telling us these things he adds that all from Sheba will come with Gold and incense proclaiming and praising the Lord! ~ Maybe that is where the traditions begin of the wise men becoming kings! Sheba was located in Ethiopia. Sheba as a word means promise or oath! So the Magi came bearing promise ~ the truth ~ an oath!

I began by challenging us ~ asking how we wear our faith and I will end with the same challenge asked slightly differently ~

So do you allow God to clothe you and how does that show in your life 24/7? If you only wear your faith as Sunday best ~ do something about it and if you wear your faith daily make sure it is presentable and attractive to others! Amen.



Epiphany ~ 6th January 2019

Creator of the heavens,
who led the Magi by a star
to worship the Christ-child:
guide and sustain us,
that we may find our journey's end
in Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Readings:

Isaiah 60:1-6	OT page 700
Ephesians 3:1-12	NT page 190
Matthew 2:1-12	NT page

(NIV used in sermon preparation).



May each of you know God's blessings in the New Year. The churches New Year, of course, started six Sundays ago on Advent Sunday ~ as we entered the annual season of expectantly waiting for the celebration of the birth of our Lord incarnate!

So what did the Spirit reveal to you in those weeks of waiting? Take a moment to reflect ~ did you stop and look again at the detail of God's preparations to give us His presence in His Son or did you turn up on a Sunday ~ take what was on offer and go home for another week ~ giving God little thought?

Maybe that sounds and feels a little harsh! ~ I am not judging any individual in those questions ~ but I am challenging you all to recognise how you live your faith. ~ Do you put your faith on once a week, or less, like a coat to wear in specific weather or a special piece of jewellery or do you wear it 24/7 and miss it if you are not wearing it ?

If you prayerfully look at that challenge it will tell you a lot about your relationship with God ~ and God asks that we continually seek to know Him.

Today we celebrate Epiphany ~ the visit of the Magi to the Holy Family and our celebration is shrouded in tradition and myth. Have you ever noticed that the Bible tells us very little about this important visit? What does it tell us?

- It tells us that wise men, from the east, having followed a special star that they had interpreted to mean something very important, brought gifts to the infant child,
- It tells us that on their journey and search, the wise men called in on King Herod ~ which panicked him somewhat as he saw the possibility of a challenge to his throne! Herod consulted his advisers and he requested that the Magi return and tell him if and where they discover the child so he too could make a visit!
- We are told that the Magi brought gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh in honour of the child!
- We are told that the Magi are then warned in a dream not to return to Herod but go home another way, which is what they did!

But what are we not told ~

- We are not told that there were three wise men or Magi ~ only that between them they brought three gifts! It is likely that there were more and that they travelled with many servants ~ even family members ~ a full caravan journeying and familiar in a nomadic land!
- We are not told that the gifts were normal for the day as they were those presented to a new born royal ~ because of their spiritual significance ~
 - I. Gold, a precious metal for Kingship,
 - II. Frankincense, a highly valued perfume which Isaiah (60:6) tells us is used in praise of God and for acknowledging a deity, and
 - III. Myrrh an expensive anointing oil used at death ~ a little like Nard. ~ (the oil or semi solid used to anoint Jesus feet)
- We are not told the names of the Magi ~ yet we know them as
 - I. Melchior ~ who traditionally presents the gold,
 - II. Caspar ~ who presents the Frankincense and
 - III. Balthazar ~ who presents the Myrrh
- We are not told what the Magi wore or what they looked like! ~ We would expect them to be richly dressed as they were wealthy men and would expect them to look Asian or African because we know they originated from the east of Israel. However tradition needed the wise men to be kings and so

developed to suggest that

- I. Melchior is said to have long white hair and a white beard, he wears a gold cloak and is reputed to be king of Arabia!
- II. Caspar (Gaspar) had brown hair, possibly a beard and wore a green cloak and a gold crown with green jewels set in it. He is reputed to be the king of Sheba.
- III. Balthazar, has black skin and possibly a black beard; he wears a purple cloak and is reputed to be the king of Tarse and Egypt.

As you can see from our nativity tableau we do not put much store on that developed tradition and simply dress our Magi richly!

- We are not told how Mary and Joseph reacted to being given all this wealth in the gifts they were given but they would have known their significance ~ Luke (2:19) tells us that Mary treasured all the things that happened and pondered them in her heart.
- We are not told what became of the gifts but we can hazard a guess! Mary and Joseph were poor ~ once the Magi had left to return home without reporting to King Herod, the threatened king orders the killing of all male infants of two years of age or under! Joseph is warned in a dream, by an angel, to flee to Egypt and wait there until it was safe to return. (Matthew 2:13-23).

There is no account of how the Holy family survived as refugees but they were certainly survivors! What would you do if, in your luggage, you had valuable gifts ~ surely you would use them to provide for your basic needs ~ after all they were all sellable commodities ~ especially the gold! God had provided for the Holy family and after all they had been through they would hardly be likely to ignore God's provision! Matthew tells us that they responded to all the Lord told them to do through the dreams that Joseph had, they were hardly likely to sit around quaking and feeling sorry for themselves were they?

So what are we to learn from this final episode in the Nativity? Certainly that God provides! God provides not only for the Holy