Sermon on Epiphany 2021

Matthew 2.1-12

What an amazing story. Wise men, magi, astronomers, men who for years have watched the movement of the stars, are convinced that the appearance of a new star heralds a very important birth and they decide to up sticks and follow it in the belief that it will lead them to a new born king.

Three years ago in Youth Church, we had a young lady who was very keen on following the royal family. She knew all about them, kept up with their daily movements and relationships and had article and newspaper cuttings chronicling their lives. Every time a major event happens like a royal wedding or birth, she endeavours to be near the scene of the action. She wants to be part of it. The royal family are very important to her. So I can imagine her travelling to London to be near the action.

Here we have wisemen travelling an enormous distance following a star, in the belief that they would see the birth of a new king. They do not have the internet, the radio, Facebook, television to tell them of this. They just have each other and a belief that the movement of stars foretells important actions on earth. An unusual star foretells an unusual birth.

So they travel and after a diversion via King Herod - that has dire consequences for baby boys in Bethlehem and causes the holy family to flee to Egypt - the wise men meet with the young Jesus and present their gifts.

No toys, no cuddly teddies, no warm blankets. Instead they bring surprising gifts for a baby - prophetic gifts. Gold - gold for a king. This child is to be King of Kings, higher than King Herod, higher than any other king, King over all Kings. A king who would reign over all on earth and heaven. I wonder if they could see that in this child? Whether this was revealed to them? Do *we* see this in the baby Jesus? Do we offer to him the honour and duty and obedience that is due to a King, high King over all? Do we offer to him our gold? Our finances? Our resources? To do what he wants with them?

Frankincense - this is used primarily as incense in religious ceremonies. Burning a fragrance as part of the offering to God, a pleasing aroma to God, to heighten our senses, to make us aware of the focus of worship - God himself, in our midst, among us. I wonder, did the wise men see the divinity in the child Jesus? Do we see the divinity in Jesus? Fully man, yet also fully God. Do we kneel and pay homage, do we praise him and worship him?

Myrrh - an ointment used for a fragrance, used also for pain relief — it was offered to Jesus on the cross; used for embalming a dead body, used for embalming Jesus’ body. I wonder, was this prophetically given by the wise men? Did they foresee his violent death on a cross? Did they keep that to themselves, or did they share that news with Joseph and Mary? I wonder.

Three extraordinary gifts, three prophetic gifts, given by men who showed commitment, perseverance, a strong belief that something extraordinary was going to happen and a desire to be part of that. Through their diligent and careful observations they saw the changes in the heavens and acted on it. They were totally focussed and were prepared to sacrifice all - to face danger, uncertainty, ridicule if they were wrong. Prepared to set out and keep going until the goal was reached. I wonder, are we like that? Do we set our mind on a goal and keep working at it? Do we persevere until we achieve our aim? Do we even have a goal? A purpose?

God has one for us. For each one of us. Even in this pandemic.

I wonder what goal God has for you? What plans God has for you in this coming year? Can you trust him for them?  Can you lay everything before him and like the wise men just go for it and keep going for it? Can you bring your gifts, even your life to God, and say, “Do with them, with me, what you will?” It could be very simple. Keep loving your family, your neighbours. Keep reaching out to them, praying for them, bringing them into God’s presence, to the manger in your prayers. It could be that we are invited to live more closely to Jesus, to trust more deeply in him, to let go of any fears or uncertainties. It could be just to sit at the manger and hold the Christ child. And in that holding to allow the peace of God to enfold us. For whatever we give to God, God rebounds back to us in overwhelming measure.

I wonder what God has planned for you in this coming year? Whatever it is, remember the courage, perseverance and determination of the wise men. Let their example encourage you to diligently seek Jesus, to bring the gift of yourself and your love to Jesus and in turn receive from Him, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, fully man and fully God, the one who gives and keeps giving even unto death on a cross. Amen.

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