

## *JANUARY 6 ~ EPIPHANY*

**READINGS:** Matthew 2:1-12; Ephesians 3:1-12 Isaiah 60:1-6; Psalm 72: [1-9],10-15

### *Sermon A*

In Ephesians Paul can ‘celebrate’ even though he is in prison. The reason for this celebration is that the secret has been revealed and the Gentiles can now receive God’s grace. As Paul puts it: ‘...God has now revealed the secret by the Spirit...The secret is that by means of the gospel the Gentiles have a part with the Jews in God’s blessings; they are members of the same body and share in the promise that God made through Christ Jesus.’ It is precisely because he is an evangelist to the Gentiles that Paul is in prison. The emphasis on God’s revelation being made available to the Gentiles also permeates the passage from Matthew. Within a few verses of Jesus’ birth we are given a narrative showing Gentile figures revering Jesus and offerings gifts which echo words from our Old Testament readings: ‘The kings of Spain and of the islands will offer him gifts; the kings of Sheba and Seba will bring him offerings. All kings will bow down before him...May he be given gold from Sheba...Great caravans of camels will come, from Midian and Ephah. They will come from Sheba, bringing gold and incense.’ The Magi were probably wise men and priests from Persia, whose work combined ‘astronomical observation with astrological speculation’. These were individuals of different motivation and status from modern creators of ‘horoscopes’ for the tabloid press. Their work would have been treated with respect in their own culture – which is shown by the seriousness of the expedition to find the new king. The message behind all this activity is that God has revealed himself to pagans in their own worship and brought them to complete worship of Christ.

By contrast, the ‘Jewish’ Herod (regarded by many contemporaries to be from a convert background) is shown to have little knowledge of the Messiah, turning to his aides for information. He also leaps to the conclusion that any such figure is simply a personal threat to his power, not someone to be accepted or worshipped. Meanwhile, Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah is reinforced by the reference to Micah’s prophecy about Bethlehem as his birthplace. This is important as it shows that Jesus didn’t just look or act like the Messiah, he was born in the right place – something no mere mortal could arrange.

## *SERMON B*

Our two New Testament readings tell us about different people who met Jesus in very different ways: the apostle Paul, and the wise men. Paul was in prison, and that could have been a time for him to be fed up and angry, but instead he tells the readers of his letter to the Ephesians that he can see the plans of God for himself. He can see that Jesus came for all people, not only the Jewish nation. God revealed himself to his people through his Son. We need to see the same, and see God at work today, changing the lives of people through Jesus.

The wise men were not of the Jewish faith, but they searched for Jesus because they could see an unexpected star in the sky. They continued to see the star for most of their journey from the East, and it even seemed to wait for them while they went to see King Herod. Herod – some of his ancestors may well have been Jewish – was too confused and worried about the new king's threat to his power to see what the wise men were saying. It was the wise men who were given the great opportunity to see the newborn baby. What do we see about God's plan for all people? Do we see people discovering Jesus, and are we helping them?

While Paul was still in prison, he not only saw that God had a plan, but knew that he was part of it. In his letter he knows that he is an unimportant, ordinary person and yet by the grace of God he has been chosen to tell others. He knows that he will suffer for his work for God, but he doesn't mind. The wise men's studies of ancient scriptures and their knowledge of the stars meant that they knew a new king was to be born. Because they knew this, they were willing to give up a lot to travel to the area where the star guided them. They had the faith to know they would see the new king, as indeed they did. Like the wise men and Paul, do we know that we have a part to play in carrying out God's plan?

Paul knows God's plan, has seen it in action, and worships God. He could have given up when it was tough, but instead he is able to worship God, the maker and creator of all things. He can worship, despite everything he has been through, because he can see God's plan and knows his part in it. On their long journey, the wise men were able to see the star that led them and know that it would lead them to a new king. But what did they do when they got there? They did what we should all do – kneel down and worship.

Epiphany is about things being shown or revealed to us, so that we can see, know, and worship. Today God wants us to see that he has a love for

all people, to know that we have a part in his plan, and to learn to worship his Son, Jesus.