

Epiphany: God's revelation to the nations

Epiphany means a revelation. Matthew's Gospel shows an amazing revelation by God to some quite strange people, the Magi from the East. While this has become a familiar and lovely part of the Christmas story, we should never forget its radical and disturbing message

Read: Matthew 2. 1 - 12

Spiritual seekers

The Magi were spiritual seekers from a faraway country, possibly present-day Iran, and from a completely different belief system. They were drawn by God through the appearance of a significant new star. This is a truly remarkable story.

Questions

- Why do you think these people put themselves through such a long and arduous journey?
- What personal qualities do you imagine the Magi might have had?
- Where are 'spiritual seekers' to be found in our own culture?
- Where do you think they might be in our parish and in Taunton?
- What, do you think this passage has to say to us about 'spiritual seekers' and our attitudes to them?

The question of power

Try to read the story as a story of two kings – a heavenly king and an earthly king.

- Compare Herod and Jesus (now a baby). What kind of authority do they exert? Who is rich? Who is poor? Who is influential? Who is at risk? Who is anxious? Etc. (Consider the difficult material in the rest of chapter 2 as well.)

Two different Kings – two different ways

Herod the anxious, Herod the jealous, Herod the liar, Herod the manipulator, Herod who creates terror and carnage. Herod who symbolises the ways of the world, of this world.

When people, companies, organisations and leaders function like Herod to ascertain their power, consolidate their position or force their ways; it always ends up with people being hurt and losing their lives.

- What parallels do you see between Herod's behaviour and what is going on in the world in our own times?

Jesus does not need to use schemes and status to attract. The heavens direct people to him (angels and a star). He does not need a palace, privileges or luxuries to be recognised as a king. There was no worldly sign of his kingship, yet on arrival, the wise men "rejoiced exceedingly with great joy" and lay down kingly presents.

Astrology??

The passage raises a particular issue about astrology. For the early Church, (and for us), it was important to make it quite clear that Matthew was not saying that people can or should 'work things out by using astrology'. John Calvin wrote in his Commentary on Matthew:

'Matthew is not saying we can work things out from the stars. He is saying that *God* made a revelation in the heavens, in a way that made sense to these spiritual seekers. It wasn't an astrological secret hidden in the stars but, rather, it was God acting in his creation.'

What is wrong with Christians using astrology, horoscopes, or other kinds of 'special knowledge'?